Winona's Dreams Come True

Margaret Widdemer

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WINONA'S DREAMS COME TRUE

BY MARGARET WIDDEMER

WINONA'S DREAMS COME TRUE
ILLUSTRATED

WINONA ON HER OWN
1 ILLUSTRATION IN COLOR, 3 IN HALFTONE

WINONA'S WAY
A Story of Reconstruction
FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR, AND 3 OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

WINONA'S WAR FARM
ILLUSTRATED BY HARRIET R. RICHARDS

WINONA OF CAMP KARONYA
ILLUSTRATED BY HARRIET R. RICHARDS

WINONA OF THE CAMP FIRE
ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES E. MEISTER

THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND
ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER BIGGS

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS PHILADELPHIA

WINONA WAS FASCINATED BY A PAIR OF JADE-GREEN SLIPPERS EMBROIDERED WITH PINK ROSES AND WISTERIA

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BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER

AUTHOR OF THE "ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND,"
"WINONA OF THE CAMP FIRE," "WINONA'S WAY," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
E. CORINNE PAULI

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1923

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AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

DEC 19 '23

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TO

MABEL CLELAND

WHOSE COLLABORATION HAS MADE
THIS BOOK WHATEVER IT IS

ILLUSTRATIONS

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WINONA'S DREAMS COME TRUE

CHAPTER ONE

WINONA MERRIAM, her cheeks flushed and her hair slightly rumpled, was sitting on the floor before the fire, in the living room of the Little Crooked House, holding a corn-popper over the bed of ashes.

"One of the things I shall always regret," said Winona's friend, Louise Lane, leaning idly back in her chair with her arms clasped in back of her head, and watching the corn-popper with deep interest, "is that we didn't all go down to Billy Lee's for Christmas."

"It was a disappointment," said Winona, looking over her shoulder at Louise, but continuing to shake the popper vigorously.

"Perhaps he'll never invite us again," went on Louise. "And I've always wanted to have that Lady of the Manor feeling that you must have, when the negroes jump out from behind trees and things at you crying 'Christmas present, Missy!' and you deal them out tea and tobacco, according to their sex. Now, perhaps, I'll never be able to do it," and she sighed ex-

aggeratedly. "Winnie!" on the breath that was the end of her sigh, "You're letting it burn!"

Winona rescued the burning corn, while Tom, her brother, who was sitting in a big chair, pushed just the proper distance from the fire to keep him comfortably warm, said:

"Winnie was probably thinking, as I was, that the negroes would appreciate a package of tea and a pound of tobacco about as much as an Eskimo would appreciate an Eskimo pie. If you didn't give the women and girls each a dress and the men and boys a silver cigarette case, they'd have no more use for you, and you'd probably have to cook your own Christmas dinner."

"I wasn't thinking that at all!" said Winona indignantly, "Tom is getting to be terribly cynical. If I didn't know that it was only a pose of his since he became a newspaper reporter, and that he thinks he has to act like a disillusioned old man of eighty, I'd worry about him. But father says to leave him alone, and he'll get over it."

Tom frowned across at her, but he looked so funny, with his naturally good-natured face wrinkled up, that the girls couldn't help laughing, and finally Louise pursuaded him to look at himself in the mirror which hung be-

tween the windows, and in which he could see himself quite plainly, without getting out of his chair. He looked at himself for several minutes as though in admiration of the scowling young face that looked back at him, then he laughed too, and peace was restored.

Winona, by this time, had buttered and salted the popped corn, and had put it in a large glass claret-bowl, on a table convenient to them all, and had gone over to the sofa, where she sat with her feet curled up under her in her favorite attitude.

Nobody spoke for a time, then Louise broke the silence by saying,

"I wonder what time Charles and Helen will be home?"

Winona looked at her wrist-watch and jumped up.

"They ought to be here any minute," she said, "Let's light all the lights in the house, and Tom, do put some more wood on the fire so that it will look nice and cheerful when they arrive. Anything that is as depressing as a dark cold house to come home to, I don't know."

"It always makes you think how nice and warm and gay, the place was that you've just left," Louise said, getting up and following Winona, "especially if it's your childhood home that you're leaving behind."

Helen and Charles Grace were a young married couple, who lived with Winona and Tom Merriam and Louise Lane in the Little Crooked House. Helen, who had been Helen Bryan, before she had married, had been one of the charmed circle of the Camp Fire girls, and her step-mother had been the leader of Camp Karonya. They had been home for the Christmas holidays and their return, with the news of the little home town, had been looked forward to all day, by the girls and Tom.

Tom heaped the fire with wood and the girls went through the house turning on all the lights.

Helen and Charles, coming along the dark street five minutes later, saw the Little Crooked House brightly lighted from top to toe, with paths of light leading invitingly to every door and window. They smiled as they saw it, standing so warmly welcoming them, and together, hand in hand, they ran up the little path and knocked at the door.

Winona was the first to reach it and she flung it open with a cry of welcome. Then they were bustled in, and taken out of their wraps and given the best seats in honor of the occasion, and for the next ten or fifteen minutes, they were bombarded with so many questions that it seemed no one was listening to what the

others were saying at all. But after a while, they settled down, and Charles, who was the eldest, and the business man of the house, and much respected by the others, said:

"Look here, we've got to organize this thing. Take turns, all of you, each one being allowed two questions. Louise, you start."

"Everything's gone completely from me," she said, looking around at the others, who were eagerly waiting. "I think it's the hungry look in Tom's eyes, that is making me nervous. He looks ready to pounce on me, if I don't hurry up. How are father and the children and the store," she hastily added.

"Fine," said Charles and Helen together. "They all sent their love to you, and said they'd never forgive you for not coming home for Christmas."

"Thanks," said Louise dryly "that's cheering."

"Now, Winona," said Helen, smiling at Winnie, as she spoke.

"How is Mother?" asked Winona.

"As sweet as ever," Helen said heartily, "she sent her love to you and said to tell Tom . . . . , but that's the answer to one of Tom's questions, when it's his turn."

"And Father and Florence?"

"Your father is very well," Charles answered for Helen, who seemed to hesitate.

"And Florence?" repeated Winona.

"Florence isn't." Helen said, with a slight puckering of her pretty brows.

Winona sat up anxiously and Tom leaned forward in his chair and said:

"What's the matter with the child? Why didn't mother write?"

"Oh, I don't mean she's ill," explained Helen. "I'm sorry I frightened you. You see it's this way. She's in with a crowd of girls who think they're terribly smart. They have their hair curled all over their heads like Zulus and they wear dresses to High School that have made the Principal rise up in righteous wrath, and they wear long ear-rings and they smoke. They acted so badly at the last Junior dance that the chaperons called the dance off and sent them all home in disgrace."

"Only they didn't think they were in disgrace," Charles took up the tale, "They thought they had been quite smart, and the next week they hired a hall down-town in the Dwright building, and they ran their own dance, without a chaperon in sight. And they got away with it, too, for what can be done with them? They're too old to spank and be put

to bed, and punishment of any sort goes off them like water off a duck's back."

"Well, I'll be darned," said Tom, "But," he added, "I'd like to have her alone for about five minutes. I'd soon find a way to get her out of her foolishness."

"I think it's perfectly terrible!" cried Winona, looking very much distressed. "If Florence is worrying Mother, I think it is time we did something."

"That's just it," said Louise, "But what can we do?"

"We'll think of something," said Winona determinedly. And with that, the subject was dismissed and the talk went on to other news of home.

Sometime later, when Louise and Winona were on their way upstairs to bed, Winona said.

"I have an idea about Florence."

"I knew you'd think of something," Louise said admiringly. "What is your plan?"

"If no one minds, I'm going to ask mother if Florence can come and visit us during the Easter vacation. In the meanwhile we'll think up something to do to cure her of her ways."

"Of course no one will mind," Louise said heartily. "But Easter is a long way off."

"Only about two months, it comes early

this year," Winona answered, "Besides she couldn't very well leave school."

And so it was left that way. Winona wrote her mother a long letter and received a longer one in reply. It was arranged that Florence should spend Easter week with the girls and Tom and the occupants of the Little Crooked House settled back into the regular routine of living.

It was about a week later that Tom called Winona up at the Garnett Neighborhood House.

"It's Louise's night off, isn't it?" he asked.

Winona and Louise were both working at the Garnett Neighborhood House. Winona did a little bit of everything, from taking care of hastily left babies of mothers who had to go "up-town" to being the regular librarian of a children's branch of the Public Library's Extension Division. Louise was playground worker and Camp Fire leader, with irregular and long hours which sometimes kept her in the evenings.

It happened to be one of the nights that she had free, so Winona told Tom.

"Would you like to meet me at the Eighth Street elevated station at five-thirty?" he asked provokingly, knowing that the girls dearly loved anything out of the ordinary, and that

with the proper amount of mystery in his voice, he would keep them guessing as to what was going to happen, until they met him.

"You know we'd love it!" cried Winona enthusiastically. "Where are we going?"

But Tom wouldn't tell her. He only said to be there on time and hastily rang off.

She went in search of Louise to tell her about it and found her on the playground, swinging a gaudily dressed little girl. As Winona came toward her, she said:

"I wish there was some way of telling whether Calliope likes being swung or whether she is frightened to death. I've forgotten all the Greek I ever knew so I can't ask her. If I stop, she'll scream as loudly as she's screaming now, so until you tell me the news I see gleaming in your eye, I'll keep her swinging and then we can cut and run, and she won't be able to catch us."

Winnie laughed, and delivered Tom's message.

"I wonder where he's going to take us?" Louise said, and she began to slacken Calliope's flight through the air. "What time is it? If it's after five we'd better start."

Winona looked at her watch and found it to be exactly five, so Louise said:

"Then run along and I'll close the playground door and be along in a minute."

Winona, looking back over her shoulder, as she reached the door leading into the house, saw the devoted but disgusted family of Calliope, carrying her off the playground. It was hard to tell whether Calliope was glad to be on her way home or sorry to have to leave the playground, for she was still screaming, as loud as ever.

At five thirty, when Tom met the girls on the elevated platform, he said:

"I got in touch with Charles, and he, in some mysterious way only known to husbands and lovers got in touch with Helen, and they are going to meet us here too."

The girls were glad, for they had rather worried about not being able to let Helen know that they would not be home for dinner. Although they each did their part of the housework in the Little Crooked House, they always tried to see that no one was ever inconvenienced or kept waiting, if they decided to stay out for a meal. They tried always to be able to tell the one whose turn it was to prepare the dinner, beforehand.

When Winona and Louise had decided the winter before, to find positions in New York and take an apartment with Tom, they found

Helen and Charles glad to go in with them. They had not been able to find a suitable apartment, but just when they were getting thoroughly discouraged, and ready to give up the search, they had come across the Little Crooked House, and then and there decided that it was the one place in New York that they wanted.

So they moved in and fixed and planned and shifted the rooms, and now it was their home, with the stamp of each of them to be found in it. There was a quaint air of a patchwork quilt to its interior, where the period room of Helen's and Charles' looked superiorly across the hall at the gayly colored chintz hung room of Winona's and Louise's which in turn, looked upon the aloof mannishness of Tom's room, with a you'll-come-to-me-some-day air.

The living room had the same pleasant patch work effect as the rest of the house. Men's pipes and boxes of cigarettes were on the same table with work boxes and vases of flowers, and a comfortable seat which Tom had made out of an old top of an automobile and fastened to the back of an upright piano, which was turned with its back to the room, was considered a particular work of art and only to be equaled by the famous davenport which belonged to Helen and Charles and which stood

before the fireplace. And so they lived "all together in the Little Crooked House" in peace and harmony and cheapness, as Louise said.

Helen and Charles soon came along and as they walked down the stairs to the street, Tom whispered to Louise.

"I'm taking you all on a Greenwich Village party."

"Really?" whispered Louise, her eyes dancing, "Oh, I know we're going to love it. We've never been down here before."

The twisted, sometimes pretty streets of Greenwich Village wound invitingly here and there, in the late twilight. Hand-painted signs bearing the names, colored lanterns, pups, and cats, hung over doorways, which looked dark and mysterious from without but through which glimpses could be seen of roughly hewn tables and chairs, and the conventional Greenwich Village idea of lighting, candles and orange silk covered electric lights.

Helen and Charles walked ahead, arm in arm, for they were still "terrible lovers" as Louise said. Tom followed with the two girls. They walked through Eighth Street and across Washington Square. Although it was early in the season for them, the busses were filled inside and out.

"They look like comfortable Noah's Arks on wheels," Helen laughingly said, over her shoulder. And so they did, with everyone sitting two by two.

After walking several more blocks, they came to an alley, and went down a short flight of steps to a basement restaurant.

It was so lighted, that coming into it from the street, their eyes were unable to distinguish clearly the occupants of the tables, and therefore they stood in a hesitating group for several minutes in the doorway, that is, all but Tom, who seemed to know his way perfectly. He went forward and was greeted by a pretty girl with black bobbed hair, who pointed to a table in the corner. Tom came back for the others, whose eyes now being accustomed to the dim light, followed him.

There was no cloth on the deal table. Along one side of the wall a long bench had been built and Helen and Charles dropped down on this, three high back chairs held the others.

Tom ordered, what seemed to them, a most surprising dinner, for a dollar. While they were waiting for the soup plates to be changed for beautifully smelling piping hot fried chicken, Winona took the opportunity to look around. By this time every other table was filled. And each of them seemed to have,

almost as though it were a stage setting, and they had been picked out as types that were exactly alike, a boy and a bobbed haired girl. Some of them were smoking, some sitting holding each other's hands, in plain sight of all, and one girl, having had a quarrel with the boy she was with, was frankly crying.

Louise, looking around too, gave her bobbed hair a toss.

"This is the first time I've ever felt that I fitted into a picture," she said, "I'm sure Winnie and I look as dashing as anyone here, and you ought to be proud to have us, Tom, for you're the only male present with more than one girl. Here, you have the three prettiest girls in the room at your table. Look!" she broke off excitedly to say.

"What?" demanded Winona.

"Look over by the door." said Louise.

Winona looked, and saw a tall lad standing in the doorway trying to accustom his eyes to the smokiness of the room. She gave a cry of welcome.

"Oh, Roger!" she called aloud.

At the same time the tall boy recognized them and came swiftly forward. It was Winona's hand that he took first, and it was to Winona's side that he pulled a chair, after he had spoken to the others, and been gleefully

pulled this way and that by all of them but Tom, who sat back with a complacent grin on his face.

After they had settled down again, and the first questions as to how long he would be in America, and how had he been so clever as to find them in the Green Parrot, of all the restaurants in New York, and how his mother and sister were, had been satisfactorily answered, Louise caught a glimpse of Tom's face.

"Look at Tom," she cried. "He's eaten millions of canaries. Come, tell us, were you the clever person who got up this lovely surprise?"

"He was," said Roger, "He was the one who made it possible for me to see you all so soon, because when I called him up this afternoon, and we talked it over, he asked me to have dinner with you all at the Little Crooked House, but the trip was so long, that I would have wasted a good hour of your society, as I knew I had to see some people on business, so he agreed to bring you down here for dinner and let me run in and meet you."

He looked at them all in turn, as he explained, but he managed to add to Winona in an undertone:

"Are you glad to see me? It seemed to

me that I thought the old boat would never dock, this afternoon, and I wanted to call you up at once at the Garnett House. But then, I thought I'd surprise you more by just walking in on you all this way."

"Of course I'm glad to see you!" said Winona. "I didn't realize I liked surprises, but now I've seen you, I know I do—this kind anyhow. You really are one of the most considerate young persons I've ever met."

She looked up at him half teasingly, half affectionately.

"Do you mean that?" he asked a few minutes later. The others had interrupted their tete-a-tete for the time being, but when there was another chance to speak to Winona, he did so, in the same low voice, picking up the thread of their conversation where they had dropped it.

"Mean what?" asked Winona, forgetting for the time, just what he was referring to.

"That I am one of the most considerate men you know," he answered.

Winona laughed.

"Perhaps I think you're a copy-cat," she said teasingly.

Roger flushed and looked hurt.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"Why, as we sit here, all of us together, it

is exactly like the time we were looking for apartments, and after we did find the Little Crooked House, we all went to dinner at an Italian restaurant and there sitting at a table, looking as pleased as punch, was Billy Lee! None of us knew he was in town except Charles. I remember telling you about it and you probably thought it was so clever of Billy and Charles, that you and Tom would try it."

Roger looked angry for a minute or so, then he said with his nice honest smile, that instantly changed him from a cross but good looking man into a mischievous schoolboy:

"Forgive me Winona, if I haven't staged a surprise party. I meant well, and at least this isn't an Italian restaurant and we'll do anything you want to do after dinner."

Winona impulsively leaned forward and patted his arm.

"I'm sorry I teased," she said contritely.

Louise heard her and of course wanted to know what she had been teasing Roger about, and Winona, with an apologetic little smile at Roger, told her. Recalling the Italian restaurant party, opened up a flood of "do you remembers?" and for a time the conversation was general.

After a little while Roger again leaned

close to Winona and spoke in the same rather tense low voice:

"Am I forgiven and do you still like me?"

"What ever is the matter with you Roger?" asked Winona, rather impatiently for her. "You know I was only teasing you, and I said I was sorry. Goodness knows I used to tease you enough in the old days to have you pretty well used to it by now."

"But that was different," Roger went on. "Then it didn't matter so much, but now I want you to like me, oh, so very much."

Winona looked at him, half puzzled. She wasn't quite sure whether he was teasing her or not, to pay her back. But there was a look in Roger's eyes that she had seen once or twice before and had never quite been able to find the reason for it.

"I'll think you're one of the most tragic boys I've ever known, if you don't stop looking at me in that funny melancholy way," she said, rather nervously.

"I'll tell you sometime why I have it," he replied, and then he turned to Helen who was sitting on the other side of him, and it seemed to Winona that he talked very gaily, making the girls and Tom laugh over the story he was telling.

Winona left to her own thought, wondered

about the change in Roger. He had always been a rather quiet, tense, masterful boy, ever since she had known him. That was for seven years. It was seven years since she and Louise and Billy Lee had found Roger lying in the woods, near their home, unconscious. They had administered first aid and brought him round. During the war he had served as an airman. Most of his time was spent in England where he lived with his mother and sisters, with only these occasional trips to New York. He was Sir Roger Mendon in England, Sir Roger Mendon of Mendon Hall, but to the boys and girls who had saved his life, he was a jolly companion and genuine friend.

Roger, keeping up his reputation of considerateness, started his dinner with the chicken course, so as not to keep them waiting. It was a truly fine dinner to the young people who had to be so careful as to what they spent. There was macaroni and salad and finally Spumoni ice-cream for dessert, and heavy sweet Turkish coffee served in wee cups and flavored with orange-flower water.

It was exactly eight o'clock by the old clock on the Judson Memorial Church, as they came across the square. Under the Washington Arch they walked in a group, much to the disgust of several taxi drivers who told them to

get on the sidewalk. To them all it was one of those evenings when life seems so gay and happy and worth living, that nothing unpleasant can pierce the rosy enveloping haze. As they stood on the corner of Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue, the lights from the hotel on the corner lit up their gay young faces. Older people passing in taxis and busses and motor cars, smiled to themselves at the young happiness of the group.

Roger had made reservations at the hotel where he and his mother always stayed, and he had left his bag there. But Tom insisted that he stay at least the first night, with them in the Little Crooked House.

They divided into pairs to walk up the Avenue, and Tom and Louise soon out-distanced the others, for they both liked to walk swiftly. Roger and Winona, on the other hand sauntered along, and after walking a block or two in silence, Winona looked up at Roger and said with a smile:

"Well, tell me about her."

"About whom?" he asked, looking down at her with the melancholy light again in his eyes.

"The girl you're in love with," she answered. "You always used to tell me everything, hurry up and begin! Is she pretty?"

Roger looked at this new Winona, laughing and flirtatious.

"I'm going to ask you a few questions first," he replied. "Will you promise to answer them?"

"Of course," she laughed. She couldn't remember anything that she couldn't tell Roger.

"Where is Billy Lee?" was the first question.

Perhaps it was the sudden mention of his name that made Winona blush, and then hate herself for doing it.

"Why he's down South," she said, demurely. "I got a letter from him this morning."

"So you still correspond?" Roger said.

"I should hope so!" cried Winona indignantly. "He's the best friend we have—almost." She added the last, purely from kindness of heart, for it was true, Billy Lee was the best boy friend that she and Tom had.

"I see," said Roger, frowning, and for several blocks they walked along in silence.

She glanced up at him once or twice, but seeing that he still wore a preoccupied and somewhat injured look, she decided not to speak to him again, until spoken to, and proceeded to enjoy herself by herself.

It was lovely on Fifth Avenue. The lights,

as far as one could see, stretched like a double row of diamond necklaces on the black velvet darkness of the night. Like jewels in a giant's crown, the red and amber and green traffic signal lights, shone high up, in their grey steel towers.

As they crossed the next street, they came upon the others who had stopped and were waiting for them.

"Something is being put to a vote," said Louise. "Would you two like to go down into the depths of Chinatown with Tom and me, or ride sedately home on the top of the bus, with Charles and Helen."

"Of course if you want to go to Chinatown, we'll have to go along as chaperons," Helen broke in to say, and everyone laughed, for it was a little habit Helen had, of wanting an excuse for doing things she particularly wanted to do herself. Having layed the responsibility on other shoulders, she always proceeded to enjoy herself.

"That settles it," said Louise, "We go to Chinatown, and not on one of those bumping sight-seeing busses either. Tom has promised to lead us to the deepest dives and introduce us to all its worst characters."

"Why Tom, where did you ever meet them all?" asked Helen, opening her eyes like a

surprised kitten. She often took Louise's jokes literally but whether she did it purposely or not, no one ever could tell.

" Oh, he's a deep-dyed, double-back action villain a yard wide!" Winona said light-heartedly. " Aren't you Tommy?"

Tom only shook his head, and told her in a stern brotherly way not to be silly, and turned the little party eastward on a cross town street.

CHAPTER TWO

LITTLE crooked winding brown streets. Stores on either side, with windows filled with Chinese gods, looking very much at home for all that they were under Western skies; incense burners, in forms of temples; brown and white, withered looking, lily bulbs. Other windows holding trays of Chinese trinkets, carved ivory and jade; bracelets of green and yellow and palest pink stone; Chinese embroidery made into fascinating bags with jade ring handles. Long, long strings of carved sweet-smelling beads, ready to be wound around slim young throats; Chinese prayer books, Mandarin hats; gay little colored skirts and coats for Chinese girls; fans of peacock feathers mounted in ivory handles, alluringly graceful, and prettiest and daintiest of all, Chinese slippers, tiny, gayly embroidered things made of silk.

The girls and boys found each window more fascinating than the one before. Slim tall dark doorways divided them from their neighboring windows. Mysterious doorways that hid the secrets of the East behind thin panelling.

A slinking black and white cat came out of the shadows of one of these doorways and

crossed the street directly before them. Winona impulsively put her hand on Roger's arm and he took it and pressed it gently for a minute to reassure her. It was so much like old times that Winona smiled up at him in her friendly way, glad to forget their past conversation on Fifth Avenue and the small prick of unhappiness that she had felt at the thought of losing him. He had not denied her accusation that something had made her impulsively throw out, that there was a girl somewhere that he was in love with.

So with her arm slipped through his they walked from window to window until they finally came to a shop, bigger and more brightly lighted than the others.

Tom stopped and waited for the others to come up to him.

"This is the best store in Chinatown," he said to the five of them, gathered under the flare of a huge electric light, which hung directly over the doorway. "The proprietor is a friend of mine," he added.

"Let's go in," said Louise enthusiastically, and the others agreeing, Tom pushed open the long glass-plated door and led the way into the shop.

A fat round-faced Chinaman came from behind the counter to greet them. He shook

hands with Tom and bowed sedately to the others. With a sweeping gesture he gave them to understand that the shop and its contents was theirs, and then with another deep bow he went through a bead curtained doorway into the back room of the shop.

When they found themselves alone they looked all around. On the shelves reaching to the ceiling, there was displayed everything dear to the Chinese heart and to the lovers of Chinese things. Behind modern glass-door show cases, on modern coathangers, were old Mandarin coats and the fascinating, gayly colored little Chinese suits for girls. There was a scent of incense in the air and the red and orange shaded lights created an Oriental atmosphere that thrilled the girls.

Winona went directly to the show cases containing the slippers. She was fascinated by a pair of jade green ones embroidered with pink roses and wisteria. The flowers were outlined with gold thread, and altogether the slippers were as an adorable pair as could be found this side of fairyland.

Louise, after looking at the slippers for awhile, strolled over to the shelves where the gods lived and seemed completely lost in admiration of their ugly fat faces and repulsive bodies. Helen and Charles, together of

course, went to look at a wonderful old cabinet. The effect of the black ebony against the Chinese blue of an old rug which hung behind it on the wall, pleased them both immensely and the many tiny drawers and cubby-holes interested and held them.

Roger and Tom stood in a corner talking earnestly, as they always did, picking up the threads after a separation.

Roger was the first to stop and look around for the others. Winona, with her green slippers in her hand, had been trying to find a Chinese girl's suit to go with them, and had evidently succeeded, for she held a suit of gold cloth, embroidered in green and pink and wisteria, in her hand.

Tom raising his head at the same time looked over toward the shelves, before which Louise had been standing, looking at the little gods.

"Winona," he said sharply, "have you seen Louise? Where is she?"

Winona turned and shook her head in surprise.

"I haven't seen her, Tom," she said, "I was so interested in these things that I hadn't noticed where any of you were."

"She's not here," cried Tom, "If she went

by herself on the street, I'll never take her anywhere again. She ought to know better."

Winona realizing that Tom was really worried, put down the slippers and the gold cloth suit and went over to him.

"She can't possibly have gone very far," Helen said, "I saw her only a minute ago standing near that shelf," and she pointed to the shelf where the idols, still smiling in fat stolidity, sat in long neat rows.

Tom opened the street door, the others close behind him. After the brightness of the shop, the street seemed dark and evil looking, for it was later than they realized and many of the shops, which had been brightly lighted when they came along, now were dark and closed for the night. They noticed that the lights in the window of their store had been dimmed, too.

But there was no sign of Louise anywhere. And then, Winona, her hearing quickened by fright, heard Louise's voice.

"Louise!" cried Winona sharply, and to the others, "She's in there!"

Tom was the first to push the jingling bead curtains apart that separated the store from the little back room where the Chinaman had retired, when they had first come into the shop. The others were again close behind him. Louise, seated at a black inlaid with gold,

marble topped table, looked up in surprise. She held in her hands a lovely string of beads that might have been made of moonlight.

The old fat Chinaman was bending over, and taking from the big safe in the corner another tray of beads.

Helen said, and rather indignantly:

"Whatever are you doing, Louise? We were worried to death about you."

Louise looked around at them, and addressed Tom, who was still frowning at her.

"I'm sorry," she said, "I wanted to get a present for Winona. I thought she'd like something from here to remind her of tonight. Mr. San Toy came into the shop while you were all there—it is a wonder you didn't see him—and told me he had some nicer things back here, so I slipped away. I thought you all saw me going."

"We didn't, said Helen. "It was Tom who frightened me nearly to death. He dashed around as though you'd been kidnapped, or run over, or something equally as bad."

"Oh, I *am* sorry!" said Louise contritely. She looked across at Tom but he had moved away and was now in deep conversation with Mr. San Toy. Louise turned back to the beads.

Everybody bought everybody else a little

present. They took turns standing in a corner with their eyes shut, while the selecting went on. It finally got to be a regular frolic. Mr. San Toy seemed to enjoy it as much as anyone and bowed and smiled and brought out his prettiest things for them to see. After Tom, who was the last one to take his turn to go into the corner, had been bought the ugliest idol on the shelf, carefully picked out by Louise, Mr. San Toy served tea and Chinese nut-cakes and candied fruits.

They went out into the dimly lighted streets. Louise suddenly left them and went back into the shop. She stood on tip-toe and softly stroked the head of a green stuffed Chinese baby dragon, which hung from the ceiling on a fine silken cord. Tom went back after her. The little dragon was swinging around and around and Tom put his hand over Louise's to steady it. She looked up at him and smiled.

"Isn't he a darling?" she said. "He seems to be smiling, in greeting and farewell. And the expression on his baby face is just like a little lamb's."

"There wouldn't be much left of a little lamb if this little dragon ever saw it!" laughed Tom.

Louise laughed too, and gave the little dragon a final pat.

"I'm coming to see you again some day, dragon," she said. And the little dragon seemed to smile more broadly, or perhaps it was only the dim lights and the shadows that made it seem that way. San watching them from the dim shadows, smiled.

They ran out to join the others.

Roger insisted upon piling them all into a taxi. They were terribly crowded, but happy. They rode to the hotel where Roger had left his luggage. He went in and soon returned with a bag, but with the added room that it took up, Helen for one, decided that the taxi was too crowded and that they had better trust themselves to the spaciousness of a late subway train. Roger directed the driver to take them to the nearest subway station.

There was a letter for Winona from her mother, when they got home that night.

"Mother says Florence may come for a visit at Easter," said she, looking up from it, and said no more.

Later when she and Louise were alone she showed her the letter. Mrs. Merriam seemed to be worried about Florence, although she did not say as much. But there was an undernote of anxiousness that the girls could feel.

"We must do something!" Louise said, after she had finished reading it.

"I know," said Winona," and remember I told you that I had a plan. I'll have to count on the others and you to help me. As soon as I have it more carefully worked out I'll tell you the details."

"I know if it's your plan, it will be a good one," Louise said affectionately. She brought her hair-brush over with her and perched on the side of Winnie's bed while she brushed her hair one hundred times.

"I'm not sure it can be done," Winona said. "But I'm going to try. I'm not sure whether I've got it in me to carry it through."

"Remember you have the united forces of the clever inmates of the Little Crooked House behind you!" Louise said dramatically, waving her hair-brush as though it were a sword and she were saluting with it. "Our motto is to do and dare and stick together!"

"That's my one comfort!" Winona said, smiling at Louise.

"Do you know, I think I'll let my hair grow," Louise said a few minutes later, after they had put out the light and were in bed. "I think long hair is coming in with a bang, and what will the bobbed haired girl do then, poor thing? Some girl who didn't bob hers will

start some new fashion that simply will have to have long hair to make it becoming."

"I'll let mine grow too," Winona said sleepily.

"But you do look like such an angel child with it blowing all over your head, the way it does," Louise said, "It's so becoming to you it will be a shame."

"Well, don't worry, I won't be letting it grow for quite a while," Winona answered mysteriously.

"What do you mean by that, Ethel Barrymore?" demanded Louise. "Why the tragedy?"

"You'll see, darling," Winona answered calmly. "Now goodnight."

"Goodnight," said Louise, but added, "There's no use of ever trying to get anything out of you if you don't want to tell it, and I suppose I'll know soon enough."

"You will," Winona said, and smiled to herself in the darkness.

It was Winona's turn to get breakfast the next morning. Everything was done by turn in the Little Crooked House, except the washing of the breakfast dishes and the general tidying up of the rooms, which Helen did, because the others all went down-town to business. But even the boys took their turn in preparing the

breakfast, which was a simple enough meal on the whole, as it generally consisted of fruit, cereal, coffee and toast.

But this particular morning Winona decided to get up earlier and make waffles, which she knew Roger was very fond of, and which he always said she made better than anyone else. She was singing to herself as she mixed the batter, and got out the waffle iron. Winona was standing on her tip-toes trying to reach the dishes for the cereal when Roger came to the kitchen door. He stood watching her for a minute thinking how pretty she was, standing there with her slender arms above her head and an inquisitive shaft of sunlight, shining on her brown hair, which he remembered with a smile had been bobbed by mistake.

The Little Crooked House had tall narrow built-in closets, and the shelves only held a few dishes. The best dishes, such as the glassware and the pretty gold and white cups and saucers which Helen had painted, were kept below. This arrangement had been considered the best, after one or two of the small glasses had been broken, because of being hidden by the taller ones. It didn't matter so much if the commoner dishes were broken, and Winona was having difficulty in reaching them, for they were pushed back farther than usual.

"Good morning," Roger said finally, going into the kitchen and lifting down the cereal dishes for her.

She stopped singing and thanked him.

"Please will you get the bread and butter plates too?" she said. "They are back so far I'd have to stand on a chair to reach them."

Roger obligingly got them down for her and helped her to lay the blue and white cloth and set the table. Winona put a pretty green plant in a dull old-rose bowl in the centre of the table.

"That centrepiece is one of the things I've learned to make or grow or whatever you want to call it, down at the Neighborhood House. Our Social Worker has her whole window box filled with it and it was so pretty and hardy that I asked her what it was. And do you know, it's only grape-fruit seeds."

Roger admired it dutifully, but with an absent eye.

"Winnie," he said irreverently. "When are you coming over to visit mother in England?" You know you've been promising for a long time."

"I'd love to!" said Winona, "But I explained to you last year how the Garnett Neighborhood House seemed to be the only place for me, and why, and I love the children

so much—you can't imagine how hard it would be to leave them!"

"Well, there's nothing for mother and me to do but continue to hope," Roger said smiling at Winona, whose face was flushed and whose eyes were shining from the earnestness of her argument.

"But," he continued, "I know you always keep your promises so I'm positive that some day you'll come over and let me show you all the things I've wanted to have you see for so long. There's a secret staircase in Mendon Hall, you know."

"No I didn't know," Winona said, "I do try to always keep my promises and I can't think of any I'd rather keep than this one. I want to go to England ever so much more than you want me to go."

"I wonder!" Roger said with a little smile.

Their conversation was broken into by Tom who came into the room slipping the rubber band from the morning paper and sniffing the waffle-laden air like a hungry grey-hound.

He greeted Roger and asked Winona why she didn't make waffles every day for breakfast and by and by the others came down and ate so many waffles that Winona vowed she'd be late for business if they didn't stop.

Roger went down-town with them on the

subway. Before they separated they made plans for that evening for Roger expected only to be in town for a few weeks and he was anxious to see as many new plays as he could, and he liked taking the " inmates " of the Little Crooked House, as Louise called them, with him.

There were many of these parties during Roger's visit and many home-cooked dinners and pleasant evenings spent around the fire. Winona and Roger were constantly together, but although Winnie tried she never could feel the same perfect ease with him as she had in the old days. The remembrance of their conversation in the Green Parrot and later on Fifth Avenue remained and she was firmly convinced that Roger was in love with some girl in England. She felt that he did not tell her, only because the girl had probably not given him permission to announce the engagement. Winona was not the kind of a girl to worry about things very much, so she enjoyed Roger's society while she could, with only an occasional little pang of regret at the thought of losing even this pleasant companionship with him.

On Sunday they decided to have a picnic. This in itself was not an original idea. They had gone on picnics ever since they could re-

member. But this was to be a different kind of a picnic for they were to go to it in a handsome hired car. Helen and Charles had made arrangements to spend the day with another young married couple on Long Island, so they of course couldn't go, but the other four started at nine with a picnic basket and a couple of thermos bottles and their bathing suits.

"It's much too cold for bathing," Helen said, watching their preparations with something like envy.

"It probably is," said Louise, dropping the round black bundle which was her bathing suit, into the back of the car, as she spoke. "But we might have to wear them before the day is over. You never can tell what will happen when you go out in a hired chariot."

"She's all right," Roger said, putting down the hood over the engine and walking around to unscrew the cap to see if there was enough water in the radiator. "I went over her myself this morning."

"Why is it every man thinks he knows more about a car than any other man, woman or child in the world?" whispered Louise to Winona. "They're all alike, every last one of them."

"Well, Roger would know," Winona answered laughingly. "At least he ought to,

he's owned a car for ages, beside knowing how to drive an aeroplane ought to help some."

"So ought garage men to know," Louise said, "But don't you remember that terrible time we left father's old car at the garage to be fixed, and the garage man told us that the horrible grating noise it was making, was only a sand blister or something and Tom and I took him at his word and went gayly off to get as far away from home as we could in one afternoon's drive, and just as soon as we got as far as we could and return the same day, the whole rear end fell out, and we had to ride through two towns and the outskirts of a third before we could find a garage. I'll never forget it! We made such a noise that everyone ran out to see us, and then they would stand in rows and point their fingers at that horrible rear end and shout that we were having trouble. Just as though we didn't know we were having trouble, with all the rear end hanging down and trailing behind us like a petticoat!" she added indignantly. "And it took ten dollars' worth of taxi-cab to get us home!"

"I do remember!" Winona said sympathetically. "It was a horrid thing to have happen. I hope nothing like that happens today. Come on, they're waiting for us to get in."

Helen and Charles rode with them as far as the subway station, and they left them standing in the dungeon looking entrance, waving to them, until they were out of sight.

Winona was sitting in front with Roger, who was driving, and after they got out into the country, she took off her hat and let the fresh wind blow through her short hair.

He looked at her and smiled.

"Do you know," he said, "I think it must be your hair that changes you so much. I've been trying to discover where the change in you lay and I think I've found it now. You've been different ever since you bobbed it."

"Have I changed?" said Winona, looking up at him through the flying sprays of hair. It seemed to her that most of the change had come from the other side.

"Immensely!" Roger said with conviction, "I think you must have snipped off a lot of staidness with those curls."

"And I've thought you've changed!" Winona continued a little later, taking up the thread of their conversation where they had dropped it.

"Perhaps I have," said Roger, "I've had more time to settle down and think in the last year. But—it isn't so much a change as being more the same way."

It was on the tip of Winona's tongue to ask about the other girl whom she had built up out of her imagination, but she thought better of it and they rode on for a mile or so again in silence. It seemed safer.

"What does your mother think about Louise and me working at the Garnett House?" she asked, after a little while, irreverently.

"She thinks anything you do is just about right," he answered. "You know, you really stand very high in mother's estimation," he added, smiling a little.

Winona said warmly, "I think she is a darling! She's always been so perfectly sweet to me."

"We'd all be perfectly sweet to you if you'd come over to England and visit us," he said half laughingly, half teasingly. "Perhaps you don't know in what high estimation the whole family hold you," he added still half teasingly, but with that odd note in his voice that Winona had noticed once or twice before.

"Oh, I'll come some day!" she answered lightly, and then Louise called to them from the back, to point out a place ahead that she and Tom thought looked like a good place to rest and lunch, and they could say no more.

Going home through the soft black wall of

darkness, which the key of the automobile lights opened magically before them, Tom and Louise were in front. Roger and Winona sat close together in the rear, not talking very much, for the day had been a long full one, and they were tired, but with the nice tiredness that only seems to make the body pleasantly sleepy, but leaves the senses alert.

Roger took Winona's hand, after a little while, and held it lightly. It seemed such a natural, friendly thing to do in the soft perfumed darkness, that she hardly noticed that he held it, any more than she would have Louise's or Tom's friendly touch.

They had put the top of the car back, and she was sitting with her head resting against the cushions, looking up at the stars that always remained the same, no matter how fast or how far they sped along in the car. She was thinking of a thousand and one things, the way one does in the early morning, when dreams seem only a step away from reality. So she was rather startled when Roger tightened his hold on her hand and said in rather a husky voice:

"Winnie, could you ever love me?"

It was the last thing that Winona had been thinking of, in her half sleepy mind, but it

brought her to full wakefulness and made her sit straight and draw her hand from Roger's.

"I never thought of such a thing!" she said truthfully, and trying to catch a glimpse of his face, for she thought he might be only teasing her, but the darkness hid it from view.

"Haven't you ever?" he asked gently, "I've thought about being able to love you, for a long time."

"Why, there never was anything to make me feel that way!" she said, half doubtfully, for the memory of their conversation in the Green Parrot and on Fifth Avenue, came back to her, with the remembrance of what she had called his "melancholy" look. "I've been so busy," she added half apologetically, afraid that she might have sounded rude in her first outburst of surprise.

"But do you ever think you could?" he asked persistently. "Or are you in love with someone else?" he added jealously. "Billy Lee for instance!"

She never quite knew herself just why she colored up and dropped her eyes at the mention of Billy Lee's name. It was a trick she had that provoked her exceedingly, and she always became very angry at herself for doing it. This was the second time she had done so before Roger, and it made her rather annoyed at

him for asking about Billy all the time. Why couldn't Roger be sensible? Here he was on a perfectly beautiful evening, after having spent a lovely day together, trying to find out if she ever could love him. Of course she loved him, she had known him for years and looked upon him as she did on Billy and Louise and Tom. And she knew she loved all of them very much. But oh, she couldn't love him in the way he seemed to want her to! A way she had never thought of loving anyone. But after all, had all this come as a surprise to her, hadn't she noticed a decided change in Roger ever since he had been in New York? And then it came to her, there was a girl, but it wasn't an English girl as she had imagined, but herself! With the realization of this, she felt a pleasant little thrill go through her. All girls know the feeling when they have their first declaration of love; there is never anything else quite like it, ever after, even when the true love comes along. From that time on, it *was* a changed Winona who looked at Roger from a new viewpoint.

"Would it be so hard to fall in love with this handsome boy?" she thought to herself. From an old friend, he was subtly changed into a possible Prince Charming, and she found herself trying to catch glimpses of his face, as they sped under the electric lights which were

now placed at regular intervals along the road. And she did not answer his question.

He didn't speak again for some time. She was afraid that she had hurt him, and Winona couldn't bear to ever hurt anything or anybody. So after awhile, she leaned a little closer to him and slipped her hand back into his.

"I don't think I'm in love with anyone, Roger," she said in a low voice, "And I'm afraid I'm not in love with you. But please can't we just continue being friends, at least, for awhile? You see I've never thought seriously of love or lovers before, and it is all quite new to me. I haven't a doubt you'd make a beautiful one," she added generously.

"You're a darling, Winnie!" Roger cried, but he put her hand back in her own lap, after giving it a little squeeze. For a minute Winnie felt hurt, but then she realized that he was only being honorable and she felt a wave of deep liking for him, sweep over her.

"Will you promise me something?" he asked as they were drawing nearer to town, and the glow of the lights of the city could be seen reflected on the sky.

"Of course!" she assented gladly, glad to be able to do something he asked her.

"Will you promise me that you'll visit us sometime in England, just the same? That

you won't let tonight stand in the way? I shall feel, if you don't come, that it is because of tonight."

"I'll come," Winona said, earnestly. "I promise, and besides we'll probably both forget about tonight, anyway, in a couple of days."

"Do you honestly believe that I shall?" he asked looking gravely down at her.

"Oh, I'm not sure!" Winona half laughingly admitted. "Perhaps you'll remember it for three days!" she added teasingly. She was trying to get them back onto the friendly footing of the day.

Louise looked back over her shoulder at them, and called attention to something ahead of them, and the talk became general, until they reached the Little Crooked House.

Louise noticed that Roger and Winona were very quiet, as the four of them proceeded to give an account of the day to Helen and Charles, who had arrived home earlier. Although they said that they had had a wonderful day, they were not as gay and as enthusiastic in their description of it, as usual.

"It may be love or tiredness," she thought to herself, as she went out into the kitchen to cut bread and toast it, while Tom fried eggs for sandwiches for them to eat before they went to bed.

CHAPTER THREE

It was a grey Saturday that Roger took the boat for England. Winona and Tom and Louise went down to see him off. They crowded into a taxi, with his bags outside, and drove to the dock. It was their last dissipation, Louise said, for they considered taxis a luxury, only to be used on such an occasion as this one.

The girls were delighted with the boat, which was the largest of its kind, and they arrived early enough to go aboard and look all around. In the shadow of one of the smoke-stacks, Roger drew Winona back, in the pretense of showing her something.

"You won't forget your promise, Winnie?" he asked.

"About England?" she said smilingly, "No I won't."

"Yes," he answered, "I do wish you were going back with me now."

"It would be nice," agreed Winona, half shyly looking up at him. She could see how pleasant it would be, to be going across with Roger. She thought how good-looking he was, as he stood looking down at her, in his grey tweeds, and the collar of his heavy coat, up

around his neck. The melancholy look, that she had thought was for another girl, was in his grey eyes.

"Don't you think you might be going back with me some day?" he asked, half whimsically. He had not mentioned love again to her, since the night of the picnic, and now he was not quite sure how she would take his lapse back into the lover-like mood of that night.

Perhaps it was because it was a grey day, and they always made Winona wistful, perhaps it was because Roger was going away, and soon there would be thousands of miles between them, perhaps she didn't want to hurt him, or make him unhappy, this last time she would see him. It might have been the combination of all these things, that made Winona unable to find either laughter or surprise in her heart, with which to form her answer. What she found there was something new, something she never before had known was in her heart. It was, a tiny vision of herself as Roger's wife and the mistress of Mendon Hall. She knew she would be happy as his wife, she was sure of this. Roger was so kind, and his mother and sisters were sweet and lovely to her too. But, as though a shade had been drawn down, and hidden it from view, something hid the vision,

and she saw him again, only as the old friend of her childhood, and this vision remained.

So it was with warm friendliness in her voice, that she said:

"Perhaps I might, some day!" and laughed, as she said it.

"You darling!" he cried, recognizing the warmth in her voice and putting a different interpretation on the look in her eyes to suit his wishes. He spoke so rapturously, that two older people passing at the time turned to look at them. "Do you really mean that!"

"Oh, Roger, don't hold me to anything!" she cried. "I'm really not promising anything, understand. I just mean, well—you never can tell—and besides, I think it would be lovely to be going with you to England."

"I think its only the trip you're thinking of, and not of having me as a companion. I think you'd just as soon go with Louise or Tom, or Billy," he added jealously.

But the gong sounded before Winona could answer him, and Louise and Tom came from around the huge smokestack. There was only time left for a few more words alone, while they were walking along the deck to the gangplank. There was still a note of jealousy in Roger's voice as he said, in answer to

something Tom had asked him concerning Billy Lee.

"Of course I'm sorry I missed Billy!"

Winona gave a little gasp.

"How perfectly stupid of me!" she cried, "I have a letter here for you from Billy. He enclosed it this morning in a letter to me, because he knew that we'd be coming down to see you off, and he wanted you to be sure to have it." She handed Roger an envelope.

"Thank you very much," he said in rather a stiff voice, and slipped it into his overcoat pocket.

It was so unlike the sweet-tempered Roger, that Louise looked at Tom in surprise, to see if he had noticed anything different in him. Winona was afraid she knew the reason for the stiffness, and she was glad when the warning gong sounded all ashore for the last time and they had to hurry away. As they stood on the dock, with Roger high above them on the deck, she half shyly blew him a little kiss. It was a thing she might have done to anyone of her friends, but now, when she did it, she couldn't quite help wishing that she had the little kiss back safe where it belonged, for she saw him look eagerly down at her, seeming half to be begging for her to give him some little farewell

token of relenting, but she couldn't do it, and he looked disappointed.

The boat swung round and was soon headed down stream. They stood and waved to the grey clad figure, as long as they thought he would be able to see them.

"I wish there were no such things as leave takings," Winona said a little while later. "I always miss people so horribly."

"It will be hard," agreed Louise. "And we'll miss the riotous time we've been having with Roger lately," she added practically. She looked rather sharply at Winona as she said this, for she had more than suspected Roger's undeniable admiration for Winona.

But Winona didn't seem to hear her. She had taken a letter out of her hand-bag and was reading it, leaning forward to catch the last rays of the watery looking setting sun, which had come up at the last minute of the day, to look around before going to bed.

The letter was from Billy Lee, and Winona was reading it over for the second time. She always liked getting letters from him, more than from anyone else she knew, for they were typical of him and told so much.

Billy Lee was rather a shy boy, without the poise and easiness of manner that was Roger's in such a degree. Billy was inarticulate at

times, at others, he held people by the hidden force that was somewhere deep down in him. People liked and admired Roger, but they turned to Billy for sympathy and understanding.

This particular letter contained an amusing account of some of the negroes on the plantation where Billy lived, and Winnie read it aloud to the others. Louise looked at her and smiled. She felt that she needn't worry about Winona. No girl whose lover is taking her promise with him back to England could laugh as wholeheartedly as Winnie was now doing, she'd be missing him too much. But a little later when she looked again, Winona's eyes were filled with tears.

"I shall miss Roger more than ever, this time," she said childishly, "we were together so much because you and Tom were always pairing off."

"Cheer up girls," Tom said, seeing that Louise was beginning to look unhappy too, and thinking it was time he broke up the gloom that was beginning to envelope them. "Florence will soon be here and then for Winnie's wild plan!"

Winona had told them all about what she intended doing when Florence was visiting them, and they had agreed to help her, although

they thought as Tom did, that it was a wild plan.

So the trip across town in the brown and white taxi and uptown in the subway was spent pleasantly enough making plans for the coming visit of "flapper Florence" as Tom christened his younger sister.

The night before she was expected they had a final council.

"But I don't see what she'll gain by it," Helen said, referring to Winona's plan.

"Don't you see, I want her to realize how silly it is to act the way mother says she's been doing. Perhaps seeing her own sister making an idiot of herself will bring her to her senses."

"I don't think it will," Helen said somewhat discouragingly. "If I know Florence."

Winona called up a Beauty Shop the next day and made an appointment. Louise and she went there together after they left the Garnett House and for an hour and a half, Winona gave herself into the hands of a slim young girl who promised enthusiastically to make a beauty of her. Louise was allowed to sit on a high stool in the corner of the dressing room and watch her friend's progress on the road to beauty.

It was a changed Winona, indeed, who later went home in the crowded subway with

the ever faithful Louise. Her eyebrows hadn't needed to be shaped, fortunately, but they had been artificially darkened, as had her eyelashes. Her bobbed hair had been curled until it stood out all around her head like a Fiji Islander's. She was rouged and powdered and perfumed.

Men stared at her, and women too, but the men's stares were cool and calculating or impudent, and the women's, nearly all of them, were amused or disapproving.

"If I ever get you home, I'll breathe again!" Louise whispered to Winona, that is, as well as anyone can whisper in the subway.

"Isn't it dreadful!" Winona whispered back, half laughing, half aghast, "But it's worth it, if I manage to bring Florence to her senses."

Helen and Charles shrieked when they saw her, and drew her under the light for a better view. But Winona had no time to listen to them, now. She shook their detaining hands off, and ran up to the room she shared with Louise, to change her frock. She had let one of her dresses down until it almost swept the ground, and with her curled hair and some added powder and rouge, it was a completely changed Winona.

"You certainly are a wonder!" Louise said, a little while later, as she watched Winona

practice for the last time, the lighting and smoking of a cigarette, which she had taken from a little vanity box which hung on her arm. It had a place for powder and rouge, besides the compartment for cigarettes. Tom had given it to her.

The Little Crooked House had many visitors, both boys and girls, and among the most frequent, were two boys who were on the same paper as Tom. He was bringing them up to dinner, that night and the three of them were stopping for Florence at the Grand Central Station. The boys had been taken into the secret of the regeneration of Florence and they had promised to help all they could.

Winona had just dabbed some more perfume behind her ears, with the glass stopper of the perfume bottle, when she heard the front door open with Tom's key. She forgot her rôle in the first excitement of seeing her sister. Florence seemed glad to see Winona too, and for a time they talked of home while Florence washed her hands and face and brushed her hair. Winona was surprised to see that Florence was pale and rather mournful looking. She also looked in vain for the ear-rings and the powder and rouge, which she was sure Florence had been using, for her mother had told her so, frequently, in her letters. But she

put the absence of them down to the fact that Florence might be afraid to use them before Tom and the others. Once or twice she had caught Florence looking at her eyebrows and rouged lips very hard, but nothing had been said.

"You look tired," Winona said, gently, "as though you hadn't slept very well lately."

"I haven't been able to sleep much lately," Florence said sadly, and then much to Winona's surprise, she started to cry. Florence had never been an emotional child, and now Winona was almost at a loss as to what to do with her.

"Please don't cry!" she begged, patting Florence's back, and trying to think of something really consoling to say, for she could tell the poor child was unhappy.

But Florence only continued to bury her head in her arms and sob. Winona begged her to tell her what was the matter, but Florence refused, and then, as sudden as the storm of tears had broken, they cleared up, and Florence sat up, the same, very reserved Florence that Winona had always known. The weeping girl who had cried so hard a few minutes ago, had entirely disappeared. Winona knew how to handle this Florence who now sat on her bed.

"Come and let me help you dress," she said, "We'll be late for dinner if you don't hurry."

"Thank you, I can do quite nicely, by myself," Florence said, getting up and going over to bathe her eyes. But the traces of the tears seemed to have disappeared along with the girl who had been shedding them, and her eyes looked none the worse for the weeping.

The little dress Winona buttoned up the back for Florence was neither too short nor too long. It was a simple little frock, that any girl might have for her graduation. But Winona again thought of herself and Tom as being the reason for the frock and the lack of make-up.

When they went down stairs they found Tom and his two friends out in the kitchen with Louise and Helen, helping them with the dinner. Their laughter sounded gay and care-free and Winona watching Florence was glad to see the mournful look disappear almost entirely. But the new look that took its place was strange to her too, and made her remember that it was time for her to begin to play her rôle.

So, as though a garment had been slipped over her head, Winona's manner changed entirely. She laughed affectedly, when she

greeted the boys. She fluffed out her bobbed hair and opened her little vanity case to gaze in the mirror, and what she saw there evidently did not please her, for she proceeded to powder her already white nose and make up her mouth, until it was like a red scar against the whiteness of her face. Then she took a tiny gold-tipped cigarette from the box and asked Tom for a match, which she lighted by scratching it on the sole of one of her slippers, meanwhile balancing herself by holding on to the hand of the boy nearest her.

Florence looked rather startled at first and then stole a look at Tom to see how he and the others were taking it. But they didn't seem to mind, although Tom seemed even more quiet than usual.

Preparations for dinner were progressing nicely and Helen sent some of them to set the table. Winona acted more wildly than ever. She flirted so abominably that it was all Louise could do to keep from laughing.

"Winnie's a born actress!" she whispered to Tom, under cover of the laughter at some silly joke of one of the boys.

"She's too good!" Tom said, frowning slightly. He didn't look at all happy.

When they were finally seated at the table, with steaming, plates of soup before them

David Browne, one of Tom's friends, took a flask from his pocket and poured some of the contents into five glasses.

"Who'll have some?" he asked, looking around at them all. "Tom? Fred? Charles? and who else? You girls had better draw lots for the remaining one."

The boys took theirs but set them down untasted. Helen and Louise shook their heads, Florence looked from one to the other and half extended her hand, but then decided not to, after seeing Tom's face as he watched Winona, who hadn't hesitated a moment about taking the fifth glass. She held it now, daintily, and looked preoccupied, as though she were trying to think of a toast to suggest.

Helen and Charles and Tom were frankly disapproving. They all sat watching her and trying to catch her eye, so that they could shake their heads at her. Even Louise, thought that Winnie was going a little too far, even to save a sister.

"Winona, I wouldn't do that!" she said. But Winona only turned to David Browne, who sat next to her, and clinked her glass with his and swallowed the contents before she answered. The drink made her choke and gasp and take a drink of water.

Florence watched her all the time. It was

hard to determine what her face expressed. Whether it was admiration, or disgust, or a touch of both, was hard to tell.

After her drink Winona became gayer than ever. She teased the boys, made fun of Louise, told Helen her nose needed powdering and acted altogether as unlike the Winona Florence knew as possible.

While they were removing the meat course dishes, Helen took the opportunity to whisper to Louise.

"When will this dreadful party be over?" she hissed. "I really didn't think Winona would go as far as to drink, and what could David Browne been thinking of to have brought anything?"

"You know Winnie would do anything to keep up the picture," Louise said loyally.

"I wasn't criticizing Winnie," Helen said, "I am only worried that she'll go too far for her own good and make herself ill."

"If she died, she'd go through with it," Louise sighed.

After dinner was over they went into the living room and Winona went to the Victrola and put on the jazziest record that Tom had brought home, during the last few days, and he had brought home a lot of jazzy ones for Florence's benefit.

David Browne, who seemed to enjoy his rôle, went over and took Winona in his arms, ready for a fox trot. Tom asked Louise and Helen and Charles paired off, so there was only Fred Morrow left for Florence. Ever watchful of Florence, Winona had noticed her swaying shoulders and tapping feet, when the record had started, but when she caught Winona's eyes she stopped and flushed and the sad little droop to her mouth showed again. It was evident that she had forgotten herself for the moment when she had first heard the music, and was really wanting to be dancing. But when Fred asked her to, she shook her head and remained sitting, her feet curled up under her, in the corner of the settee before the fire.

Cheek to cheek, Winona and David circled the room. Louise and Tom, dancing more sedately, had more time to study Florence's face. The flickering light of the fire made her seem older than she was. She made no effort to amuse Fred Morrow, who sat next to her and tried bravely to make conversation. She seemed only to want to be left alone and allowed to lose herself in a brown study.

When the record was over Winona ran and changed it, and then taking David by the hand led him over to Florence and said:

"I think Florence has been waiting for

you to dance with her because she knows you're the best dancer here. Don't feel badly Fred," she continued laughingly, turning to Fred, "you shall dance with me, I don't mind if you step on my toes."

Everyone laughed at this, for Fred prided himself on his dancing and had been, if the truth was told, a trifle piqued by Florence's attitude.

David Browne wouldn't take Florence's "no" for an answer. He insisted and soon they were dancing, the others following.

"Do look at Florence!" Louise said in a low voice to Tom. "I think she is trying to show Winnie the proper way to dance. I really think Winona is putting it across to her. She looked quite worried and shocked at Winona's actions at dinner."

"I don't blame her," Tom said. "If Winnie keeps this up I'll be shocked myself. I'll get a chance later, to tell David Browne what I think of him for bringing that stuff to drink."

"I could have slapped you all, for being so noble and not drinking yours!" Louise said indignantly. "I think you are perfectly horrid and unfair. Here is Winona trying to show Florence what perfect fools some girls are nowadays, when they think they're being

smart, and you criticize her because she's carrying it through to the end. I think David Browne is the only one who's really trying to help her act her part, and the rest of you are just prigs."

"Look here Louise!" Tom cried, "I'm not criticizing her! She's a perfect peach to do what she's doing, and I know it. Only it sort of sets my teeth on edge."

When the dance was over, Winona dragged some cushions off the couch and sat down on the floor on them. She opened her vanity case and made up her face again, and even took a small comb and ran it through her hair.

"Girls certainly don't leave much to the imagination these days," Charles said, watching her intently. "I know that no words of mine could bring a blush to your already blushing cheek, Winnie. Now, Helen for instance. See how she blushes, at the mere mention of her name?"

They all laughed, for it was true. Caught unawares, Helen did blush, long and red and all over.

"Stop looking at me!" she begged. "I know there is absolutely no reason for me doing it. It was simply because Charles suggested that I should!"

When they found it teased her, they kept

it up, until finally she was able to stop and the fun went out of it.

David Browne sat cross-legged on the floor next to Winona. She was smoking another cigarette and they were talking in low tones, once or twice Winona giggled hysterically.

Fred Morrow put on a record. A slow dreamy Hawaiian waltz.

Winona refused to dance, saying it was entirely too slow, but Fred and Florence waltzed decorously around, Florence holding herself like a little ramrod.

"What a terrible time the child must be having, if she's trying to live up to Tom and me!" thought Winona, watching Florence through half closed lids, as she sat among her cushions. "I wonder if she really wants to act the way I'm doing. I don't see how anybody really could want to, though! It's so hard to keep it up all the time." and she sighed.

Louise couldn't resist laughing another minute, and made some excuse to leave the room. She was closely followed by Tom. Out in the friendly darkness of the hall they stood and rocked in silent laughter, until the tears ran down their faces.

"It's the funniest thing I ever saw!" Louise said finally, wiping her eyes on her handkerchief. "It's as though a fairy came and waved

a wand and made them change souls. And they're both unhappy in their parts, I'm sure of that! And they both wouldn't stop acting for anything."

Tom laughed too, and agreed that the situation was unique, but when they returned to the living room and the dancers, things seemed to be more serious than when they had left them. Winona her face flushed under the rouge, whether from dancing or the cocktail it was hard to tell, was in the act of taking another drink. She was holding the slender glass in her hand which was shaking so that some of the liquid splashed over the side.

"Steady there!" David was saying familiarly, and he took hold of her hand and held it while he poured with the other. Winona only laughed and allowed his hand to remain where it was, and told him to hurry up.

Tom flushed and started toward them, but Louise held him back, by a whispered word. Charles and Helen and even Fred Morrow, looked rather worried.

But when Winona drained her glass and held it out for more, Louise gave a little cry and started forward.

As though awakened from a stupor, Florence came to life. She was like a flash of

lightning as she jumped for the glass and took it from Winona's hand.

"Stop it!" she cried, and her voice sounded horror-struck. "Stop it Winnie!" she repeated, wildly.

The others kept back. Louise watching with interest, noticed that the two girls, usually so unlike, faced each other with a curiously like look of determination.

"Stop what?" Winona asked coldly.

"Drinking that awful stuff!" Florence cried. "Oh, I wish mother was here or. . ."

But she hesitated at the second name. Winona looked Florence directly in the eyes.

"Mother or who?" she asked.

Then another change came over Florence. Suddenly she became a self-conscious figure of a girl who knows a man is interested in her. She dropped her eyes before Winona's searching look.

"Mother and who else?" Tom asked this time, coming over to stand between the two girls.

"The man I most respect!" Florence answered primly.

"A man!" cried Tom, "Good gracious! Florence and a man! A man you say? How old is he, eighteen or nineteen?"

Dangerous sparks came into Florence's

eyes. She drew herself up to her full height and walked away from the centre of the room, where she had been standing before Winona, who still sat among her cushions.

"I said a man," she said "but if Tom and all of you are going to tease me, I'm not going to say any more, except that if he were here he would———" Words apparently failed her. She gave the glass she held a scornful little push, after she set it down on the table.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE door of the Little Crooked House was always on the latch and people, knowing this, never bothered to ring or knock. So no one heard the front door open and some one cross the hall. No one heard anything, for they were all intent upon Winona and Florence.

And so Winona, looking up from her nest of cushions, looked directly into the steady blue eyes of Billy Lee, who stood in the doorway. She was just about to take the glass, which David had filled at her request, but at the sight of Billy her hands dropped to her sides—the tinkling of the shattered glass accompanying the action.

This was the picture that Billy Lee saw and his blue eyes were as cold as wind-swept icebergs, as he looked at Winona.

"I'm sorry," he said in a voice as cold as his eyes. "I'm afraid I should have telephoned. I only got in town tonight and I thought I'd come up here directly."

For a moment everyone stayed as they were, as though they were holding the pose for the releasing click of the camera. Then Tom and Louise came forward and reached Billy at the same time.

David Browne held out his hands to Winona and helped her up and she too walked over to Billy, but she was constrained before the look in his eyes. Helen and Charles joined the little group around him then, and after that things seemed a little easier. David Browne and Fred Morrow remained where they were.

Then it was Florence who on this evening of surprises who surprised them still more. She ran over, and flung herself on Billy and kissed him heartily—something that she had never done before.

She then stood on tip-toe and whispered something in his ear. He colored up and shook his head, but finally appeared to agree, and excusing themselves, they went out into the hall, Florence still clinging to his hand.

"What do you think of that?" gasped Louise, "the down-right——"

"Taking our best friend right out from under our very noses. She's certainly a swift worker, even for a flapper!"

Winona, looked tired and rather pale under her rouge. She didn't answer Louise, but went over and sat down on a very stiff backed chair.

They could hear Florence and Billy talking in low tones out in the hall, and in a few minutes they came back, looking rather embar-

rassed but with the look too, of people who share a secret and intend to tell everybody about it at any cost.

Florence walked over to Winona, where she sat in her stiff-backed chair, and said in a calm clear voice, with a suspicion of scorn in it:

"Winnie dear, you don't have to pretend any more. I've been saved ages ago."

"What do you mean?" asked Winona, flushing slightly.

"I mean this," said Florence haughtily, and thoroughly enjoying the upper hand, "Anybody could see you weren't used to doing any of the things you were pretending to do this evening. Here, let me show you how a real flapper, as you all call them, acts."

She took the vanity case from Winona and snapped it open.

She gave the powder-puff a few little shakes before applying it to her nose and chin. Then she touched up her cheeks with the rouge. Her mouth, after moistening it with the pink tip of her tongue, she outlined dexterously with carmine, then ran a moistened finger-tip over her eye-brows. Next she took a cigarette and tapped it gently on the back of her hand before lighting it, keeping a firm eye fixed on the fascinated Winona, in the meantime.

"That is to get the tobacco away from the end you have to put in your mouth," she explained with condescension. She took a match and instead of lighting it on the sole of her slipper as Winona had done, she simply held it and snapped it alight with her finger nail in the approved style of movie heroes and villians. She didn't blow it out, only waved it in the air to extinguish it.

"There," she said, as she sank down on the pillows that Winona had left on the floor, and crossed her slim young legs, "That's the way—the up-to-the-minute way the flappers smoke. The trouble with you Winnie, was that you are behind times. Now give me the flask please."

She held out her hand but David Browne looked across at Winona with raised eyebrows, and Winona shook her head. So he slipped it back into his pocket.

"Very well," she said, "But Winnie, remember this. A cocktail is a thing to be enjoyed. Not to be gulped down in a hurry with a drink of water afterwards. You'd think you were taking medicine."

The others had been watching her in fascination. The rouge and powder had changed her completely from a simple little school girl

in a white frock, to a girl who looked as though she had been born old.

"Well, I guess I have explained enough," she said wearily. "And now I think it is time that you all went to bed after your hard day's work."

She looked half scornfully at them all in turn. Fred Morrow and David Browne seemed glad of the opportunity to leave and bade everyone good night with alacrity. Tom went to the door with them. After they had gone he came back into the living room and went over to Florence. She had risen from the cushions and was standing before one of the windows, idly swinging Winona's silver vanity case by its slender chain. He swung her around to face him and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Now tell us young 'un," he said. What do you mean by this up-stage manner?"

"Oh, nothing much—to you," said Florence, "But if you must know," and here she cast a glance about before she made her severe announcement. "I'm in love!"

It was indeed an evening for strange things to happen. It was Winona now, who jumped up and went over to the window, pressing her forehead against the cool pane. Over her shoulder her voice came back to the others in

the room, and it sounded as though the tears were very near the surface.

"Anyone could see that you were," she said.

"What do you mean?" Louise and Tom said in unison. And Tom added, "You don't mean to say that you're taking her seriously?"

"I don't think you know who he is," Florence said. "He is the nicest man in the world." And she sighed. She was in the full tide of her confession now, reticence forgotten.

"Oh, that man stuff again!" Tom muttered under his breath.

Louise looked from one to the other and caught her breath. She could see what Tom could not see, that the girl was desperately in earnest. She realized too, that Florence was sixteen, after all.

Billy, meanwhile, walked over to Florence's side and Winona watched their reflection in the window-pane as they stood together.

"Florence, dear," he said gently, "I really think you ought to tell them and not make them guess anymore."

"Well," she said, and she looked directly at Tom as she said it "Billy can tell you I'm in love with a man. If age counts he's older than you Tom."

Winona turned and faced them. Her face was flushed and her eyes were shining. She

too, had stopped regarding Florence as a child.

"Can't you all see that its Billy she's in love with?" she said turning to each of them.

Everyone look surprised for a moment, and then before anyone had a chance to say anything, Helen went over and kissed Florence. Florence stood there bewildered, then she cried;

"You're all wrong! It isn't Billy Lee! I'm in love with Arthur Joyce! He's a professor in High School and over thirty." and she looked defiantly at Tom. Then her bravado broke down. She ran out of the room, and that was the last anyone saw of her that night. Later, Winona tried to persuade her to open her locked door, but she refused.

The others left the living room, looked at one another. All but Billy, who walked over to the fireplace and pushed the remaining embers of the fire together, with the toe of his shoe, until they burst into a little flame.

"It's just as well to face it," Louise said, sitting down suddenly upon the cushions on the floor. Our little Florence has undoubtedly carried off the honors of war this evening."

"Well, I'll be darned!" Tom said. "There's no telling what women are going to do next, even if you live in the middle of a

harem, as Charles and I do! Do you think it's funny to always burst out in the place you're least expected to?" he asked Louise, but she only shook her head and laughed.

As they always will do, the three girls banded together and denied that they were any more of a problem than men, and Tom crying "Help!" dashed out into the kitchen to see that the door was locked, and went up the back stairs to bed, calling to Charles and Billy to follow him or they would be slain and quartered.

"Who ever thought things would turn out the way they did?" sighed Winona, a few minutes later, when she and Louise were safely in their own room and were discussing it all. She sank into a chair wearily, and let Louise unhook her dress for her.

"Oh, I want to get into a tub and soak for weeks to get this stuff all off!" she added as she rubbed cold cream on her face, and wiped it off again with a soft cloth.

"You are a clever girl," Louise said reassuringly. "You certainly did what you started out to do. It couldn't be helped that Florence had already been saved from flapperism by that old man teacher! I'm not sure, that she hasn't jumped out of the frying pan into the fire."

"Why do you think so?" Winona asked anxiously, and added, "it is so strange that mother hasn't told me anything about him. I wonder if Florence is keeping it a secret and how Billy ever got to know so much?"

"Oh, Billy!" Louise said, "He's a regular Father Confessor. I'm sure he was one, in another incarnation. Why anyone wants to dash right up and tell him all. I've felt that way lots of times. But," she added, "Perhaps I'm wrong about the frying pan and fire. If she's engaged to the Professor, of course it may be all right."

"We'll have to pin her in a corner and find out tomorrow." Winona said firmly. "When I knocked at her door a little while ago, she didn't answer me, and I really was glad, for I didn't feel I could point out any more what I thought were right paths, tonight. Especially after the way she sat on me before the others."

"And didn't she enjoy doing it!" said Louise wrathfully.

"I wouldn't have minded so much if Billy hadn't come in," Winona went on. "I'll never forget the look in his eyes at first. If I know Billy, I'll have something to settle with him tomorrow. I'm not sure yet, whether he knew I was only pretending."

"I'm not sure either," Louise said, "And

Winnie dear, now that it's all over, I want to say that I do think you went a little too far when you drank that stuff of David's."

"Louise!" cried Winona, sitting up in bed, with her short hair standing out around her head, as though in surprise. "Did you really think that it was something? Why, it wasn't anything but tea, and horrid luke-warm tea at that—not even iced. That was why I drank so much water afterwards. David and I nearly died when Florence wanted some. How she would have crowed over that, after the way she showed off with the powder and cigarettes! If the others had only been less noble and had drank theirs, they would have soon found out, but they wouldn't, I honestly thought it was rather mean of the boys."

"Well, I might have known!" said Louise. "I think it was horrid of them too, and I told Tom so. It's really too good to keep from them but I don't think they deserve to be told. Helen and Tom were so sure that you were headed for a life of iniquity that they were really worried. I know they thought that you had been deceiving them for years, as to really what kind of a girl you were."

Winona giggled into her pillow.

"They don't deserve to be told," she agreed. "But just the same I'm going to tell Billy Lee

in the morning. His eyes frightened me, and I'm not sure they had quite thawed out, even when he said goodnight."

"I'd hate to have him really angry at me," Louise said reflectively, "He has a way of showing how he feels, more than anyone else I know."

But Winona had fallen asleep, and only the sound of her regular breathing could be heard. Louise tiptoed over and put out the light and soon was fast asleep too.

It wasn't until the following afternoon that the opportunity came for Winona to have her talk with Billy. She wasn't very much surprised to find him waiting for her when she came out of the Garnett House at five thirty. He had called for her before, when he was in town, and it generally meant tea somewhere, before they went home.

It was a particularly pretty day. Even the old wharfs that lined the water-front were clothed like princesses in golden robes of spring sunshine. Winona and Billy were forced to walk along in silence for a time, for huge packing boxes obstructed the sidewalks in this trucking district, and they had to walk out and around the drays and the patient horses, waiting for their loads. But by and by they came to more quiet streets and then

Billy, going directly to the thing which was uppermost in his thoughts, in a way that was characteristic of him, said:

"Look here, Winnie, were you really only pretending last night? Of course I knew you never made up your face that way, and I could tell you didn't know how to smoke—but why did you drink that stuff?"

"You're not the only one who thought I was going too far," Winona said, glancing up at his stern profile. "Helen and Tom thought I had gone quite beyond redemption."

"Won't you answer me?" he asked, frowning a little, but taking her arm to help her up a particularly high crossing.

"There really isn't so much to tell," Winona continued. "If it will make you feel any better to know that the stuff in David's flask was only tea, well, I'll tell you. But I'd rather not talk about last night, at least my part in it, for I felt awfully foolish, after Florence began to show me how I ought to have really acted. I want to ask you something. Florence seems to have taken you into her confidence, and no one else. She absolutely refuses to talk to me. Could you tell me something about it, or did she ask you not to? I'm so worried about it all."

"I think I can probably tell you all I

know," Billy said, after a moment of silence. "She didn't tell me much last night, only that she wanted to put a stop to your actions by telling you she didn't need to be saved. I figured it mostly out for myself. And I ran up to see your parents today, in the car. I don't think they knew very much about it, at first except that Florence suddenly turned over a new leaf and cut out her flapper friends and began to take more interest in her studies. They were glad as you might know. But I got Professor Joyce's home address from the school. I called at the place where he boards, but he wasn't there. He goes down to Plainfield for his vacations and over some week-ends. I really think Florence is infatuated with him, and we don't want to hurt her if we can help it."

Winona's blue eyes looked their gratitude and Billy felt more than repaid for the trip he had made.

"I think you're the kindest person in the world!" she said gratefully.

"I'm very fond of Florence," he said calmly, and let it go at that.

People on the street turned to look at them, talking so earnestly and seemingly wrapped in a cloak of their own thoughts to the exclusion of all else. The streets seemed to spin themselves out into a soft grey carpet, over which

they scarcely noticed that they walked. Being together made them happy, even though the subject they were discussing was not a particularly cheerful one.

Billy went on to tell Winona she was all that her parents had confided to him, and when he was through she was silent for a time, going over it all in her mind.

"So that is why she doesn't wear rouge and smothers her hair under that unbecoming hair net," Winona said, after a little while. "And that was why her trunk was so heavy that Tom and Charles had a hard time carrying it up stairs, and when we opened it, found it full of the fattest dullest looking books you ever saw! The poor child! She's trying to live up to the Professor! Does he know it?" she asked.

"Your mother said she didn't think he did," Billy said. "It seems that Florence used to sit up terribly late at night reading and she'd fall asleep with the light burning and the floor covered with the books, and they'd find her that way in the morning. And she got absent-minded and pale and she didn't eat and your mother and father thought this was worse than the flapper stage almost and it was time to stop her. So your father went to see Professor Joyce and told him, and the Professor said he didn't know she had been doing

it, and he'd speak to her about it. So he did, and Florence came home and broke down and cried and begged your mother not to mention it to you or Tom or your father, but she loved the Professor. Your mother promised, but only on the condition that Florence should make her Easter vacation visit to you, as she had planned. Yes," he continued, "Florence has confessed to being in love with a man at least fifteen years older than she is, and she's taking the entire affair with the tragicness that only a girl her age can."

"What kind of a man is he?" Winona asked interestedly. "Did mother tell you?"

"Yes. He is tall and dark and slim and nice looking. His voice is soft and purring. (This is Florence's own description of it.) He praises his pupils highly, thus getting double the work out of the girls, but making the boys take advantages sometimes. When they do this—well, according to Florence, he knows how to handle them too!"

"I'm so sorry that mother is worried," cried Winona. She could see her mother sitting by the tear-stained Florence and trying to comfort her as she used to do, when Florence was a little girl, and her doll was broken. And Florence, Winona was sure, was being terribly superior about the whole thing, seeing

herself as a woman who had experienced love, who knew the heights and depths of it; and quite pitying her mother. It was so like Florence to think that she alone felt things. She had a way of always seeing herself as the heroine of life, with her family and friends standing around, a devoted but sometimes critical chorus of minor characters. She probably thought of Mrs. Merriam as someone to whom love had to be explained. Surely, she never could have felt the thrill, as Florence did over her Professor, when she saw the brown bearded Mr. Merriam coming down the street toward her.

And here, Winona smiled tenderly, for she knew that Mrs. Merriam being the wise mother that she was, had probably sat patiently listening while Florence had explained it thoroughly to her.

"We've got to do something about it!" Winona said firmly. "Do you think Florence thinks the Professor loves her in turn? And if he does, do you think they could ever marry?"

"That's what I don't know," said Billy, knitting his brows in perplexity. "I've tried to find out something about him, but he doesn't seem to have made any intimate friends. He goes to Plainfield every chance he gets."

"I think father ought to go to Plainfield and look him up," Winona said.

"That's what I suggested," Billy agreed. "I told your mother I thought she ought to tell your father all about it, so she did. And they are going to let us know tomorrow, after your father gets back from Plainfield, just what he's found out."

"You certainly think of everything, Billy," Winona said, looking at him admiringly.

"One last word," said Billy, "and then we won't talk about it anymore. Florence acts as though she were engaged. She never goes out anymore with the boys she knows, to dances and things. She just sits around and mopes. But, as your father said, the engagement may all be in her own little head. Professor Joyce may not be serious at all. He may just think she's a pretty child, and is rather flattered by her admiration."

"We ought to get a letter from mother the day after tomorrow," Winona said, "but I think I'll call her up tomorrow on the phone and talk to her. It will be lots more satisfactory all around."

"Winnie, dear," Billy said, before he left her. "I want to tell you what a peach you are for doing what you did last night. As for the rest of us, we were all as mean as we could be about it. I'm sorry I ever thought, for a

minute, that you were really drinking, and even if you had been, I should have understood that you were only doing it because it fitted in with the part you were playing. I'm sorry, will you forgive me? I don't know quite what I would do if you were ever angry at me."

"Of course," Winona answered shyly, for she had never known the generally reserved Billy, to be as fluent as he now was. It seemed rather odd to her, but she liked it. The memory of Roger flashed across her mind. Roger would have said the same thing, if he had been walking with her, but it always came rather easily to Roger to express himself. From Billy, it was indeed a compliment.

Winona never quite knew just why she kept it all to herself that night. She was very kind to Florence and refrained from asking her any questions about the previous evening. Louise knowing that this was not a natural thing for Winnie to do, as she said she was going to ask Florence for further details, finally pinned Winona in a corner of the kitchen, after dinner and demanded an explanation.

"The child is going around like a martyr, yearning to tell how it felt when the lions bit it!" Louise said. "Why don't you let her talk? Once or twice when she started, you stopped her completely. You know she's dying for

us to ask her questions. In fact, I'm afraid she'll tell all, in a little while, of her own free will. You know yourself, you'd be dying to talk about it, if you were in love."

Winona laughed.

"I'll never forget Helen and Charles. How we used to listen to them, do you remember?"

"There you go again," Louise said, turning away. Shutting me off in the politest way, like a society matron turning the tide of conversation away from soap, which might reflect upon her husband and how he got his money! Well if you won't talk about it there's no use trying. For anyone as sweet as you are, you have the firmness of a Pilgrim Father underneath."

"Don't be huffy, Louise dear," said Winona, kissing her friend on one of her rosy cheeks. "I don't feel like talking about it tonight. But wait until I do. You know I always share my secrets with you, but in this thing, like Sherlock Holmes, I want to have a complete case to lay before you, Watson."

They went back into the living room with their arms entwined and Louise suggested a game of Parchesi, which took up the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mr. Merriam walked up the pretty Main Street of the Jersey town. A straight row of elm trees met over head and formed a cool archway of budding green. He had inquired at the post-office as to where the Professor lived and had been told that it was the last house at the end of the street. As he walked along, he went over in his mind, all that he would say to the young professor. But when he at last came to the white house, set back in a garden in which lilac and snowball bushes were just beginning to bloom, his carefully planned line of action had to be completely changed.

Sitting on a porch swing was the professor, and on his lap he held a small boy. As Mr. Merriam put his hand on the gate, the small boy pointed a stubby finger at him and said.

"Look, father."

His father looked as directed and when he recognized Mr. Merriam, he set the little boy firmly on his feet and got up and went down the path to meet him. He held out his hand and said, "How do you do?" in a voice that tried to hide the surprise that was in it.

Florence's father didn't waste much time

in getting down to the reason for his visit. He plainly and frankly explained the whole affair, and told how he and Mrs. Merriam were worried by it.

The two men talked for about an hour, then the professor went in to his wife. While he waited, Mr. Merriam looked around the tiny garden. It was well-kept and pretty and had the look of a well-loved place. He found himself liking this man, who apparently, was entirely innocent as to the state of Florence's feelings for him. He liked the small boy, too, who now stood before him, round-eyed but polite, and eyeing the gold and agate seal which swung upon Mr. Merriam's watch chain.

Mr. Merriam had just taken him upon his lap and was explaining the use of the seal, when the professor's wife came out. She was small, with brown hair and eyes and a wistful mouth. She seemed the type of women that professors and teachers always marry, because they are good, homeloving, sweet souls. Evidently she had been told something about the affair for she greeted Mr. Merriam in a friendly way and sat down in the chair which her husband had vacated.

"I've told Ruth about it," Professor Joyce said, sitting down on the top of the steps leading to the pretty garden. "I think we had

better talk it over and decide upon the kindest way of letting Florence know that I'm not in love with her."

"I'm so sorry for her, poor little girl," said Mrs. Joyce kindly. "I'm afraid no matter how we go about it, she's going to be hurt. To me there is nothing worse than disillusioning youth, and it seems that this is what we'll have to do."

And so for another half hour they talked, and Mr. Merriam accepted their invitation to stay to luncheon, and they talked some more, afterwards. And they told Mr. Merriam why Mrs. Joyce was living in Plainfield and not with her husband in the town where he was teaching. Professor Joyce had received a very good offer of a place in the High School which Florence attended. They had tried to rent this little Plainfield house but had not been able to do so, and they could not afford to let it stand empty, it was finally decided that she should stay here with the two children and he would come home as often as he could. There were quite a few week-ends that he could slip away, and every holiday. In the meanwhile the house was still in the hands of the real estate agents and a little white sign, tacked to one of the porch pillars told that it was still for rent.

But nothing definite was mapped out,

after all their conversation, and Mr. Merriam on his way home on the four o'clock train leaned has head wearily back against the cushions and wished them all well out of it. He went over all that he had heard and seen that day and he was convinced that Professor Joyce was innocent. No one could see him with his wife and children and not realize that. To him, Florence had been a pretty little school girl. A girl, whom he had noticed especially because of her obvious intention to be the flappiest of the group of flappers in her class. She had seemed so pretty and well-bred that he had regretted deeply her foolishness, and one day, when she had stayed after school to ask him about some book of poetry he had recommended the class to read, he tried to get on the other side of her flippant manner, and finding it easier than he thought, was pleasantly surprised at her intelligent mind and a seriousness that he had never suspected.

From that time on there had been many talks, and he had been glad, after awhile, to notice that she was changing her ways. She dressed more in accordance with the rules of the school and used less slang. But that she was in love with him, had never dawned upon the professor. All the love that had been in

the affair was in Florence's own little romantic mind.

And so Mr. Merriam leaned has head wearily back against the cushions and wished he was home with his wife so that they could talk it over. He was sure that she would know the kindest and easiest way to break it to Florence.

All that day Winona had been restless. Even the children who came to the library that afternoon failed to hold her interest. One of the district women brought in her new baby to be weighed. On any other day, Winona would have loved the funny little red-faced, claw-handed thing, but although she thought it cunning, she could not quite forget the unhappiness that might possibly be for Florence, and so turned it back to its mother sooner than she would have ordinarily done.

She was glad to find Billy Lee waiting for her in his car outside the Garnett House. She climbed thankfully into the front seat next to him and sank back against the comfortable cushions with a sigh. Billy, as usual was as kind as he could be. They talked of everything but that which was uppermost in their minds, for a time. When they reached the residential section, Billy stopped the car outside of a hotel opposite Central Park and turned to Winona.

"I thought you might like to call your mother up before we go home," he explained.

"I would," Winona said gratefully, getting out. "But please come in with me, Billy. I don't think I'll mind hearing anything, half so much if you're there."

So Billy went in with her and waited outside the booth door until he heard her get her number. He walked away then and went over to a directory and idly turned the pages.

Winona came out of the booth with her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Billy!" she said, "he's married! What shall we do about poor little Florence?"

"Come out to the car," he said, taking her arm and guiding her down the steps to the waiting car.

"Now we can talk," he said, helping her in and walking around to the other side to take his place at the wheel. He turned the car into the new green of the park.

"Mother says that she thinks that the best thing to do is to take Florence up there and let her visit the Joyces. I don't think that is right. It will hurt her terribly. But she is a stubborn little thing and I guess she won't listen if we try to explain it to her. However, I told mother I was going to try and get her to

listen to me tonight. I hate to do it, but it does seem kinder." Winona said.

"Poor little kid," Billy said. "It's a shame she has to be made to feel so badly. I wish there was something we could do to lessen it for her, but I suppose it's like a tooth. She'll feel better after it's out, but I never could see the consolation in that myself. It will be kinder to tell her, but I think your mother is right. I don't think she'll believe it."

"I'm afraid she won't," Winona sighed, "but it has to be done. I'm going to try to make the rest of her visit as nice as I can. She's been so stand-offish since the other night, that it has been hard to try to be friends with her. She has spent her days in the Metropolitan Museum looking up things Professor Joyce has told her about, and she writes about them in a book, every night, which she says she is going to give him when she goes home. Louise invited her to a party the Girl Scouts are going to have in the Garnett House, tomorrow, but Florence refused because she said she wasn't interested in such babyish things. I thought Louise would laugh or tell her that most of the Girl Scouts are older than Florence, but she didn't."

"Well, I'm going to telephone for tickets for tonight and to call Tom up and tell him to

bring another boy up to dinner, that is if you don't mind," Billy said. "We'll fill that poor kid's life with something besides the Metropolitan Museum and Girl Scout's parties. She won't think she's too old to see "The Bat" will she? Older folks than she have gone and been frightened too. Besides it will be something she can write about in that book of hers."

They stopped at a drug store this time, and Winona waited in the car while Billy telephoned. He came out smiling.

"I'll bet she won't write in her book what Andrew Drummond will say to her tonight. Tom's going to bring him. We'll get him interested in her before we get home, by telling him nice things about her all the way up in the car. I said I'd pick him and Tom up at the 'Moon' office."

"I'm beginning to feel better already," Winona said. Her eyes were shining and the pretty color had returned to her cheeks. Billy, looking down at her, thought how pretty she was, sitting there. He wondered what she would say if he told her that the real reason he wanted to help Florence was because she was Winona's sister. But he didn't want to make her unhappy, as it might do, if he told her now, when she was already worried about Florence, so he only smiled at her in his friendly way

and carefully hid anything else which might have been in his eyes at the moment.

It was a pleasant evening. Winona and Billy found a minute or two by themselves, and she whispered her thanks to him. Andrew Drummond was a charming boy. He had hair as red as Louise's own, and a dimple that was a surprise, when he smiled or laughed. His high spirits were infectious, and the young people enjoyed themselves in spite of the fact that they were sorry for Florence. That is they all enjoyed themselves but Florence, who seemed wrapped in a gray veil of aloofness, and refused to have anything to do with the boy with his red hair and pretty dimple. But Andrew refused to leave her alone. When he found that she wouldn't speak to him, unless spoken to, he put himself out to ask her questions, which she had to answer, or appear rude. And at one particularly funny line in the play, he turned to find her laughing as whole-heartedly as he was himself. He looked again, very hard this time, for the laughing girl was so different from the sober little one, that it seemed hard to believe it could be the same one. He spent the rest of the evening, trying to get her to laugh again, but she refused.

After they went home and Andrew had gone, and Florence had retired to her room to

write up her book, which she was keeping for the professor, Winona and the others sat around the fire which they had built more for the friendliness of it, than because they needed its warmth.

Then between them Billy and Winona explained to the others all that they knew about Florence and Professor Joyce. It was finally decided that Winona should tell Florence, making it as easy as she could for her. Then if Florence didn't believe her, they would take a trip to Plainfield on the following Saturday, and let her see things for herself.

The following morning Winona jumped half out of bed before she was quite awake. She remembered that something important was happening this day, and in her sleepy mind the thing which was to happen seemed half pleasant and half sad. While she turned on the water for her bath it came to her. The pleasant part was the fact that she and Louise were taking a group of library and playground children from the Garnett House to the circus. The unpleasant thing was that she had to tell Florence about her professor. She sighed as she remembered this, and then said wisely to herself, "one thing at a time," and proceeded to think of the circus party alone.

For weeks her library and Louise's playground children had been as good as gold. Hands had been kept clean, faces washed, and hair, more or less, combed, for there was a reason. Some of the boys found hair combing a little too much to be expected of them, but they had nobly compromised by having their heads neatly shaved. They looked like a gang of small but clean convicts.

The reason for this sudden cleanliness was a circus party. The first year that the girls had been in the Garnett House they hadn't known quite what to do to reward the good children at the end of the season, spent in fighting soiled hands and faces and tangled hair. But Winona, coming down on the top of a buss one spring morning, had seen the flamboyant signs of "the greatest show on earth." It wasn't very long ago that a circus had meant a great deal to Winnie, and she immediately thought how much the children would love it.

So when she got to the Neighborhood House she talked it over with the head worker, who became interested and helped her to work out her plans. Winona went up to see the comfortable looking manager of the circus, and found that one day of the season as set aside especially for poor children. She im-

mediately told him what she wanted and he gave her choice of seats. So having chosen the row behind the boxes, she went jubilantly home.

And with the approach of circus day this year, the children had flung out daily, sensitive feelers as to whether "the lady who shot the boids" would be there this year again and in all the beauty of her white satin and golden chariot and milk-white horse. The fate of the "men who rode in their underthings" was also deeply discussed. Would these beautiful creatures be there, if by any chance they should attend the circus again this year? And so Winona had again interviewed the comfortable looking manager and he had again given her her choice of seats.

"We'll ask Florence to go with us," she said to Louise as she called her, "She can help with the children and it may take her mind off the professor for a little while. She used to love the circus when she was small."

But when she knocked at her door a few minutes later, to ask her, Florence refused, and added in a mysterious way, that she had something else to do.

"If I didn't know better, I'd think she was going out with the professor," Louise said, when Winona told her.

"She is going somewhere, or at least she

wants us to think that she is," agreed Winona, thoughtfully. "I wish I knew."

"Well, don't worry, Winnie dear," Louise said comfortingly, "She's probably only going to see an old mummy so she can write about it in that book of hers. You know she'd act as though she was going to interview the Queen of England, if she only went to the corner grocery to get a can of peas."

Winona couldn't help laughing in spite of herself. Nevertheless she thought about her sister all the way down in the subway. But she soon forgot to worry when she turned the corner of the street where the Garnett House stood, for a neat and orderly row of children, watched over by a big kindly policeman, stood waiting for her and Louise. The policeman touched his cap when he saw the girls and greeted them with a hearty good morning.

"I've been keeping the kids in order for you," he said, with a grin. "Sure, this little chap was so afraid he wouldn't be there in time he came at seven and he has been standing here ever since."

The children delightedly but reservedly cheered the girls and more than one eye turned upwards to gaze with admiration at the new hat Winona was wearing for the occasion. She had worn it to please them and to give them a

dress up feeling, as they often said she gave them, when she wore a particularly pretty frock down to the library.

A wholesale grocery man in the district had loaned one of his delivery trucks to take the children up to the Madison Square Garden, and now it came along and the janitor and the driver, helped the children on and the girls climbed up too, and were roped in all around the sides, so that there would be no falling off.

The large red truck was a gay sight, with its flag draped sides and its human cargo. The children had one and all dressed themselves in their best and two little Italian sisters, one in a pink frock trimmed with light blue facings, and the other in orange and red, were the hub around which the wheel of lesser colors revolved. Solomon in all his glory, was never such a wondrous sight.

And the most exclusive avenues opened wide for their coming. Something about the gayness of it all acted as an open Sesame to the traffic policemen's heart and they rolled along over the smooth roadways, as Cinderella doubtlessly rolled to her first party.

Once they were held up by the traffic and an elderly man seated in the rear of a powerful motor car with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel,

leaned forward and asked them where they were going.

"Circus!" they all answered of one accord, and as though that magic word needed no explaining. The old man smiled and the smile seemed to break his face up into small unaccustomed wrinkles.

"Will you take this and buy some pink lemonade and peanuts?" he asked gruffly, holding out a ten dollar bill toward Louise.

She was just about to shake her head and thank him, when the policeman blew his whistle and the man, his car released by the signal, pressed the bill into the nearest brown hand and was off. Winona tried to get his number so that they could look him up through that and thank him, but the car had flashed out of sight. Louise took the bill from the child and folded it and put it in her hand bag.

When they reached the massive stone building of Madison Square Garden, the ropes were let down and everyone helped out. Louise kept them in line while Winona went ahead to see about the tickets. Her friend the manager was waiting for her in the lobby with a handful of pink cardboards.

"Here they are," he said. "I wish I could let you have a couple of boxes but we keep them for the crippled children, you know." Winona

turned to see some of these poor little unfortunates being carried in by the circus attendants. She turned back to the manager and thanked him and went back to Louise and the children.

"If anyone should go to heaven I think Mr. Campbell should!" she said to Louise later, as they watched him lift a little crippled child from its wheel chair into one of the front row box seats. But something in the idea of his being an angel, with a harp and his brown derby, amused Louise, although it was rather a twisty little smile.

The sawdust and the gold paint and the roasted peanuts smelt wonderfully, the children thought. There was a thrill in the air; anything was liable to happen at a circus!

The ten dollar bill bought a bag of peanuts for each child, and left five dollars more to be divided. They broke up into whispering groups to decide it all and Winona and Louise and a balloon man and a pink lemonade man and a popcorn man, all waited patiently for them to make up their minds. Finally some decided upon red and blue balloons, which, after they had been enjoyed to the full, could be taken home to less fortunate brothers and sisters. Some decided that there was no time like the present to get enough to eat and so they delighted the hearts of the lemonade and

popcorn men. But one little boy, shyly shook his head repeatedly as the balloon man offered his wares and the pink lemonade man clinked his glasses enticingly. Eyes as large and black as his own looked at him in wonderment.

"What do you want, Sammie?" Louise asked finally, seeing that he could not or would not make up his mind.

"I'd like to have the money," he said in a low whisper. "That's all, the money."

So she gave it to him, and he stored it away in some mysterious pocket and proceeded to enjoy himself.

They found that they were early enough to see the animals before the performance began. Holding tightly to the hand of their partner, they walked from cage to cage. Louise led the way, and Winona brought up the rear. There were many animals to intrigue them, but the elephants and the zebras and the camels held them longest. It was only the brazzy blare of the bugle announcing that the performance was about to begin, that tore them from the cage which held the almost human monkey. Even he seemed to realize that this was a special occasion, for he sat at his table, and rang his bell, and ate the food that was brought to him with his knife and fork quite neatly. When the bugle blew he jumped up

and ran over to the child-size white bed which stood in the corner of his cage, jumped in and pulled the covers up over his face, leaving only one bright eye peeking out.

They had to hurry to get to their seats in time, and the parade had already begun before they were finally settled. Winona entirely forgot the unhappy task before her that afternoon, and found herself thoroughly enjoying every minute. The children, of course, were spell-bound. They were quite sure that only people from fairyland, or at least who knew the fairies, could ride the milk-white horses and swing by heads and toes far above the sawdust earth. And they were positive that they had never seen such beautiful women and such handsome men.

But the height of the morning was reached when the chariot races were announced. A span of four black horses won the final race amid the shrill cheers from a thousand little throats. And then the circus was over. The last of the performers went through the black doors and a red-coated band began to play the Star Spangled Banner. Winona and Louise collected hats and coats and finally got the children down the stairs and out to the truck.

As they were passing the Metropolitan

FLORENCE WAS WALKING ALONG, DEEPLY ENGROSSED IN THE CONVERSATION OF THE RED-HAIRED, HAPPY-HEARTED ANDREW

Building, Winona suddenly touched Louise's arm and whispered.

"Look! There's Florence, and she's with some man!"

Louise looked, but the couple were too far away as yet to be able to distinguish the man, although it was easy to recognize Florence by her clothing. But soon they were up to them, for Florence and her escort were walking uptown, while the truck was going down. Winona turned to Louise in wide-eyed surprise, for Florence, whose heart was wrapped up in a married man and whose same heart Winona expected to have to hurt her by telling her of his marriage, was walking along, deeply engrossed in the conversation of the red-haired, happy-hearted Andrew.

As the truck thundered past them they looked up and saw the girls. Florence had the grace to blush, but Andrew took off his hat and waved it enthusiastically at them.

"She didn't have a hair-net on!" Louise said, turning to Winona, "Nor a book under her arm!"

"And her hair looked so pretty that way, curling out from under her hat," Winona answered. And she added: "Oh, Louise, perhaps she won't feel so badly after all!"

"Perhaps she won't," agreed Louise, and Winona felt her spirits going up.

That evening at dinner, Florence did not mention Andrew, and this rather surprised the girls for they thought that she would make some excuse for having met him, but as she seemed not to want the subject discussed, they didn't question her.

As they were washing the dishes, Winona said to Louise:

"I feel perfectly dreadful. Do you honestly think I ought to tell her about Professor Joyce?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Louise said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it would be kinder than letting her find it out for herself, but I don't think she's going to believe you."

"She'll probably think I made it up to keep her from him," Winona said with a sigh, "But I guess it has to be done, so I'll go up to her room after she goes to bed."

It seemed to Winona that it was one of the shortest evenings they had ever spent in the Little Crooked House. They hardly seemed to settle down to their sewing or reading, when Florence announced it was time for her to go up to her room. Three pairs of eyes watched her depart, and then turned sympathetically to Winona.

"I'll wait until I'm sure she's in bed," Winona announced, putting off the evil moment as long as possible. "Oh, I don't want to do it!" she added almost tearfully.

"I think we ought to just let her go to Plainfield and find out for herself," Tom said.

"I think Tom is right," Charles said. It was seldom that Charles gave an opinion unless asked, and the others now turned to look at him.

"Why?" asked Louise bluntly.

"Because she's not going to believe Winnie," he answered, and said no more.

"Well, I know that it would have broken my heart if anyone had led me up to Charles' house and I had found him married," Helen said with conviction, for once, disagreeing with her husband. "I would much rather have had someone tell me."

"You were always a sensible person," Tom said, "and I say that with all due respect to my little sister, Florence. She's as stubborn as a mule, as we all well know."

"There's nothing to do but go," Winona said, getting up reluctantly from the couch and walking toward the door.

"Call us if you need any help," Tom said somewhat flippantly and Winona turned and frowned at him.

"You are very unkind, Tom, to make a joke of it. Poor little Florence is going to be badly hurt, and by her own sister too, I honestly don't think that it is funny."

Tom flushed, "I'm sorry," he said rather shame-facedly, "I was only trying to cheer up your fainting spirit."

"I'm sorry I was so cross too," Winona said impulsively, "I guess it is because I'm so nervous."

She turned at the doorway again, and looked back at them and then went slowly up the stairs and knocked softly at Florence's door.

"Come in," Florence said in her rather high pitched voice, and Winona entered. She found her sister propped up in bed with a pile of books next to her, and a large one opened on her lap. It was evident that she was settled for a long night of reading.

"I'm sorry to bother you," Winona said, sitting down on the edge of the bed, after pushing some of the larger books to one side to make room for herself.

"There is something I want to tell you, dear, she began trying to choose her words with care and wishing herself anywhere but sitting on Florence's bed.

"Go on," Florence said somewhat pettishly,

as though she resented being interrupted in her reading.

It was probably that little note of resentment in her voice that suddenly made it easier for Winona to tell her the truth.

"I may as well be frank," Winona said, rather shortly too. "I think you know that you have been worrying mother and father quite a lot lately."

"So they have complained to you," Florence said, sitting up higher among her pillows and looking at Winona somewhat scornfully.

"Mother and father never complain," Winona said gently. Florence was making it easier for her than she realized by her scornful manner. "But they were worried; first because you were going with that silly high school crowd, and from what I've heard being one of the silliest in it. Now, although they haven't told me much about it, they are worried about you because suddenly you've changed entirely, and insist upon sitting up late at night reading these books and being cross and rude when anyone tried to ask you not to."

"Oh, Winnie," Florence said crossly, "don't always be so virtuous. I know mother and father have told you that I worry them.

But they know why I read these books and want to do things to please Professor Joyce. I told you that I love him. Why can't you let me alone? All I ask is a chance to lead my own life!" And she looked like a young tragedy queen, sitting there, then she added, spitefully: "You're leading your life, living here and going to business every day. I'd like to see anyone tell you what to do!"

"Florence dear, can't you see that mother and father and I only have your good at heart? We ask you not to go to extremes in things, and sitting up night after night reading this way, is going to hurt you terribly. And it doesn't make the slightest bit of impression on Professor Joyce, he is too wrapped up in his own life to notice what you are doing."

Florence sat up perfectly straight at this and her face was like a little fury's as she said:

"Winnie, if you are going to act as though you thought Professor Joyce was treating me like a child and not noticing me, I'll ask you to leave my room. We understand one another perfectly. I know he is only waiting to ask father, until he feels that he has enough money to support me." And she added smugly, with a toss of her head: "I'll be willing to bet I'll be married long before you are to your precious Billy."

Winona turned white. If she had been asked to analyze her feelings she couldn't have truthfully told whether she was more sorry than angry at Florence. It was so like Florence to drag in Billy and the fact that Winona had come to New York and was supporting herself. She wanted to shake her, as she sat in her youthful impudence, mocking her with her eyes.

"I don't know what you mean about Billy," she said coldly. "I wasn't aware of the fact that we were thinking of being married." She wanted to add that she would wait for a man to ask her before she announced her engagement, but she couldn't hurt Florence as much as that. "As for coming to New York," she went on, "you know that I had to support myself and I couldn't do it at home. Besides, my life has nothing to do with you making a little fool of yourself."

"I make a fool of myself," Florence said, laughing sneeringly. "I wouldn't say that if I were you, after the silly way you acted the other night, when you were trying to save me. I never saw anything so funny."

"I suppose I did make a mistake that night," Winona said. "But I made my mistake in thinking I could make you see anything but your side of the question. I thought if

you saw your own sister acting in a foolish way that you'd have the grace to be ashamed. But you only felt terribly superior because you knew how to do all those things in an up-to-date flapper way as you told us all."

"Why do you bother me then?" Florence asked petulantly, and reaching over the side of the bed for the big book which had slipped off her knees as they had talked. "I'd really much rather be left alone."

"Look here, Florence," Winona said firmly. "I'm not going to try to beat around the bush any longer. The plain truth of it is, that we don't want you to wear yourself out over Professor Joyce and his books and things because he is married."

She waited with held breath for the bomb to fall. She expected Florence to cry or deny it passionately, but her young sister did none of these things. Instead she smiled, and opened the book to the place where she had been reading. As she spoke, Winona watched her and noticed that her hands were as steady as they could be as she smoothed out one of the leaves which had become mussed when the book fell to the floor.

"Winona, please go," Florence said in a voice that an elder person might have used to a child who was a tale bearer. "Please don't

think that you are dealing with a baby or a fool. Don't you know I can see through it all? Don't you suppose I know that you and mother and father and the others have framed it all up between you? Don't you know that it wouldn't make any difference to me if he *was* married a million times? I'd wait for him to marry me if he had to divorce twelve wives to do it!" She was out of bed now, standing slim and young in her white night gown. She walked to the door and held it open for Winona, who still sat on the bed watching her in wonder.

"Please go!" she repeated, and there seemed nothing else to do. On the other side of the door Winona heard Florence turn the key and then heard the bed creak as she got back into it. She waited for a few minutes to hear if Florence, by any chance, was crying to herself, now that she was alone, but there was no sound from the room save a faint whirring which might have been made by rapidly turned pages.

CHAPTER SIX

THE others waited, frankly curious, for Winona's return and when they heard her coming slowly down the stairs Louise ran to meet her, flinging over her shoulder as she went:

"Winnie's had a bad time of it. I can tell by the sound of her steps."

A few minutes later she and Winona entered the living room together and Tom got up from his chair by the fire and placed Winnie in it.

"It was exactly as you said it would be," Winona said sadly. "She thought mother and father and I had made it up between us to separate her from Professor Joyce, and she ended up by asking me to leave her alone. I had to go, of course, but I waited to hear if she would cry when she was alone, and she didn't."

"Poor kid," Tom said, giving Winona a brotherly pat on her shoulder. "It is too bad you had to go through it but I knew she'd take it that way."

"What will we do now?" Winona asked looking around at them all.

"The next step is a pilgrimage to Plainfield," Louise said, "And I'd be almost will-

ing to bet my new gold watch that she won't believe it then. She'll probably think we all hired his wife and the children and the house."

Winona joined the others in laughing at this, for Florence's smug attitude about the whole thing had not fostered the sympathy she had felt for her in the beginning, and although she knew that it would probably come back to her when the time arrived to go to Plainfield, at present the affair seemed humorous.

They planned to make the trip the following Saturday, and the next morning they told Florence about it. She took it calmly enough but after breakfast, meeting Winona in the hall, she stopped her and said.

"You are going to do right or die, aren't you Winnie?" and laughed in her half scornful little way.

Winona didn't feel that she could trust herself to answer her sister. Several unkind answers came to her mind, but she pushed them away and said nothing.

Saturday morning came at last and Florence was up early, and went around looking so happy that Winona felt the old sympathy coming back. But later when she suggested that Florence looked prettier without her hair-net, and Florence had caught her up in the unkind way she had of doing, Winona

felt an almost irresistible desire to shake her.

Tom, looking the girls over as he had a way of doing and making brotherly remarks about their appearance in general, stopped Florence as she was about to get into the car and said:

"Whatever is the matter with you, Florence? You look like a drowned kitten! Have you shaved off your hair completely, and why the snake dress?"

But Florence only flounced past him and settled herself in the back seat.

"I suppose Winnie told you to say that," she said spitefully, "You know that I have a hair-net on and this dress makes me look older that's why none of you wanted me to wear it. But I'm going to," she added firmly.

"Well if you want to look like a snake-charmer's bride, I don't suppose it makes any difference to me!" Tom said, "But if you think you look pretty you're dead wrong. No man likes that slinky type."

"I suppose by men you mean that silly Andrew friend of yours," Florence said hotly. "He's only a child and so are you. Older men are different. They like 'snaky' types."

"Do they?" Tom asked, with a half whimsical smile. "Well, then I say let them!" and

he climbed in next to Louise and no more was said on that subject.

"Why don't we start?" Winona asked Billy, after they were all settled and Helen and Charles, who were not going, had gone back into the house and shut the door, and now stood waving to them from the window.

"We're waiting for something," Billy answered, and just then Andrew turned the corner and hurried toward them.

"I'm sorry to be late," he said, flushed and breathing hard from his quick walk from the subway station.

"We're early," Billy said kindly, and Tom pulled out one of the little seats and moved to that, while Louise and Florence made room for Andrew between them.

"Billy invited me to go," Andrew explained to the girls, looking at Florence as he spoke, and he added, almost half apologetically: "He said you wouldn't mind." Florence looked at him in her most "queenly-than-thou" way, and quite squelched him as she intended to do.

"We're awfully glad that you came," Louise said heartily, and Andrew smiled thankfully at her.

As they were crossing the ferry at Dyckman Street to go to Jersey, Winona looked back at the occupants of the rear seat. She noticed

for the first time that Florence had the little book with her in which she had been writing for the Professor. Her face was quite rosy and her eyes shining with excitement and happiness and Winona had not seen her as gay since she had been in New York. She thanked her stars that Billy had had the sense to ask Andrew to go with them, for he didn't know what was ahead of them and so was able to fit in with Florence's mood. In fact he seemed to be enjoying himself immensely and they laughed and joked together like old friends.

They planned to reach Plainfield about three in the afternoon, so they stopped in a pretty wooded place for luncheon. Andrew showed to great advantage in helping to prepare lunch, for he introduced a new way of frying the bacon and potatoes which they had brought along.

While the girls unpacked the basket, he hunted around until he found a perfectly flat stone. This he laid across two piles of smaller stones, and then proceeded to build a fire under it. Louise came over to him, where he sat blowing with all his might to make the fire start, and held out the frying pan to him, but he looked up at her and said:

"Thanks, but we don't need it. This is a new way I learned last summer when I was

camping up in Maine. I think things taste lots nicer and I hope you all will," and he laid the pan down and went on blowing. The boys collected wood and kept him well supplied, and watched him with interest as he fed the roaring fire. By and by the stone began to heat and finally he put a piece of bacon on it, just as he would have put a piece in the frying pan. It cooked beautifully and with his fork he rubbed the fat of it over the entire stone. He did this with several other pieces too, until the stone was entirely covered with grease, then he took the potatoes, which he had asked Tom to peel and cut up for frying, and spread them on the stone. Louise had brought tomatoes too, and now proceeded to cut them up for cooking.

Everything smelt beautifully and they were so hungry that they could hardly wait to be served properly on the card-board plates Winona had put in the basket.

"I think there is nothing more heavenly than tomatoes," Louise sighed, eating her fourth slice. "And fried tomatoes eaten in the open air this way along with fried potatoes is my idea of a lovely picnic lunch."

"Isn't it clever to have fried potatoes instead of the usual baked ones?" she continued. "And all we have to do is leave that stone. No horrid looking around for sand to

scrape the frying pan with. I always hate a greasy frying pan. It goes on a picnic in a charming frame of mind and comes home cross and nasty."

The others praised Andrew's new method of out-door cooking too, and he was flushed and happy from it all. Even Florence condescended to say that she liked things cooked better that way. Altogether the luncheon hour was a success.

When at last they got started again, Florence began to fret because Billy didn't drive faster. She was anxious to get there and the others, with the exception of Andrew who was blissfully ignorant of the reason for the trip, wished that the road might be twice as long.

As they neared the sleepy outskirt streets of the town, Florence became radiantly happy. Winona couldn't bear to look at her, and she couldn't help wondering how Florence was going to take it all. She caught Florence smoothing down the tight little brown frock she wore and pushing her hair up farther than ever under her hat. She seemed entirely pleased with her appearance and wore the air of a person who knows that they are going to be welcome. It seemed to Winona that it wouldn't be so pathetic if Florence was a different kind

of a girl, but her pride was going to have such a terrible fall.

She kept urging Billy to go faster. She said she had never known him to go at such a snail's pace. In fact she reminded him that Tom and the girls often had to remind him that there were speed laws in the north. But Billy took it all good-naturedly enough and kept at an even rate.

At last they came to Maine Street and drove along looking for the little house. It wasn't hard to find for Winona had a description of it from her father. It sat comfortably in its plot of ground and the lilacs and snowball bushes were in full bloom now. On the porch the professor was sitting with his wife. Winona could see that Florence had no eyes for anyone else but the man and was evidently unaware of his woman companion. She was clutching the little book tightly and her eyes were shining and her cheeks flushed. Andrew turning to look at her thought he had never seen her so pretty, even the day they had walked up Fifth Avenue and she had gone without the unbecoming hair-net.

The professor came down the path to meet them, when they stopped at the white gate. Florence didn't wait to be helped out, she jumped over herself and ran to meet him, both

her hands held out entirely oblivious of the other people in the world.

He took her eager little hands and held them for a minute and smiled down into her radiant face. He wondered what had kept him so blind in the past months. Why he hadn't noticed before, the rapture in her brown eyes.

"How nice to see you," he said in cool conventional tones. "Is that your brother and sister in the car? I must go to meet them."

The coldness in his voice did what it was intended to do, dampened Florence's spirits for the time being. She drew her hands away and turned to Winona and introduced her to the professor.

He shook hands with the boys, and asked them about the trip as they walked together up the path to the house. Winona had slipped her hand through Florence's arm as they drew near the porch, but Florence rudely shook it off and walked alone to where Mrs. Joyce was standing waiting for them. She wore her more-queenly-than-thou look again and Winona felt that she couldn't bear the situation a minute longer. She wanted to hide behind the others and let them be responsible for the whole thing, but she realized that she couldn't do this. She was closer to Florence than any of the

others, even Tom, and it was up to her to see it through.

If Mrs. Joyce hadn't been the sweet person she was, the afternoon would have been impossible to bear, but she jumped into the breach whole-heartedly and soon everyone felt more or less at their ease. She was particularly nice to Florence and told her how her husband had said Florence was so clever in her studies and worked so hard. She completely and neatly stripped the romance from any thoughts that Florence might be having regarding his interest in her work, however.

It seemed hours before they finally got away. Winona had noticed Florence trying to stuff the note book she had kept so diligently for the professor, into her hand-bag and seeing that it was impossible to do, she drew it from Florence's hands and slipped it into the huge pocket of her top-coat. Whenever she looked at Andrew she blessed Billy for bringing him along, for he did more to break the tension of that spring afternoon than anyone seemed to realize. For a long time afterward the smell of the lilacs and the odor of new growing things recalled that afternoon and the small white porch and the group of unhappy people sitting there.

It was Florence who finally whispered to

Winona that it was time they were leaving. The sun had almost set and kindly grey shadows hid her face almost from view as she said good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Joyce. She had managed to keep up a gay bantering conversation and to the others it seemed more pathetic than if she had cried or shown in some way how she was being hurt.

It was only when they were getting into the car that she took Winona's hand and whispered to her to sit in the back with her, that she showed the slightest bit of emotion. Winona gladly did as she asked and Andrew took the front seat with Billy. Not until they were well out of the town did she speak, then she said:

"I think I'll go home tomorrow."

Winona didn't try to dissuade her. She only held the limp little gloved hand tightly and said nothing.

But as they neared New York, Florence had one of her sudden changes. She sat up, straightened her hat, borrowed Louise's powder puff and powdered her nose for the first time since she had been in New York. Winona still said nothing, but watched her in surprised silence. Louise too watched her interestedly and said bluntly, "I think you look lots better

without that hair-net. Why don't you slip it off?"

So Florence took off her little round hat and loosened the net and slipped it off as Louise suggested. She took the mirror Louise held out for her and adjusted her hat at a becoming angle and patted two or three little twisting curls into place. She looked rather disdainfully down at the brown dress and gave it a pull here and there to straighten the wrinkles.

When they were going slowly down the steep road leading to the ferry, she leaned forward and touched Andrew on the arm.

"Let Winona sit in front," she said, "and you come back here with me."

Andrew would have climbed over the back of the seat then and there, but Billy told him to wait until they got on the boat.

When they were safely aboard Andrew got out and started to help Winona into the front seat, but Florence jumped out too, and said;

"Let's go up front and watch the lights on the New York shore. It's so hot in the car."

As they walked through the darkness and disappeared behind the line of cars in front, Louise turned to Winona.

"How do you really think she feels?" she asked.

"I don't know," Winona said thoughtfully. "I can't tell whether her heart is broken or whether she is not minding it at all. I wish I knew for it would be so much easier to be sympathetic."

"I hope she doesn't cry herself sick after we get home," Louise went on, but Tom, the practical, interrupted her.

"She won't cry herself as sick as we'll be if we sit in these gasoline fumes much longer. Come on let's go watch the lights, too."

"But do let's go on the back deck to watch them!" Louise said as she got out of the car. "We old folks can't spoil love's young dream you know, by going up front with Florence and Andrew. Flirting with Andrew is just what Florence needs and you can't flirt with a boy under the eyes of older people."

The others laughingly agreed to go out on the back deck and later Tom asked, "What do you know about the difficulty of flirting under older eyes, Louise?"

It was cold out in the open and Winona and Billy stood within the protection of the ferry boat's walls. Louise and Tom however, were leaning over the railing watching the black water roll under the boat.

"Oh, I know how to flirt!" she answered, half teasingly, half in earnest. There were times when Tom's taking-her-for-granted manner rather annoyed her. They had been friends for many years it was true, but no girl likes to be looked upon as a permanent fixture in a man's life, like a comfortable bath-tub or the kitchen stove.

"I never saw you flirt," Tom went on. "When do you do it?"

"Oh, I have all day long," Louise answered lightly.

"That's right, I suppose you do meet men during the day," Tom said in some surprise. "Somehow I never thought of it before. Show me how you do it?" he added.

"Gladly," Louise said laughing, and she rolled her wide grey eyes around and around until she looked like an animated kewpie doll.

Tom laughed and took hold of her arm affectionately.

"If that's the way you do, I don't think I'll worry," he said. "But I don't like to think of you flirting anyway with other people. I think I'll have to learn to do it myself!" He then proceeded to roll his eyes as she had done and they laughed so much over the whole thing that Billy and Winona, hearing them came over to see what the fun was all about.

When they at last got home, Winona hid the little book which she had carried in her pocket for Florence. As she took it out and looked at it, she felt that she would like to burn it but she was afraid that Florence might be angry at that, so she placed it in her bottom bureau drawer under her clothing.

Nothing was said the next morning about Florence's home-going. Winona ignored the subject as Florence did. She seemed to calmly settle down to stay until the following Saturday, and she acted exactly as though nothing had happened. She never mentioned the professor, however, and it became a usual thing for Andrew to call her up and take her to tea or to lunch. Three times he came home with her for dinner and fitted so pleasantly into the life of the Little Crooked House that everyone, including Florence it seemed, liked him better than ever.

Winona was the only one who had the time to go to the station with Florence on Saturday morning. Tom was off on a special story for his paper and it was one of Louise's busy days at the Garnett House. As they waited for the gates to open, for they were early getting to the train, Winona opened the subject which had been uppermost in her mind for the last week.

"Florence dear," she said, "You've been a little brick about the professor. You have been so nice about it that it has made us all feel much better than we thought we would. We were afraid you might hate us for taking you there."

"I did at first," Florence said in her high-headed young way. "I thought you all thought you were being noble and doing what you considered right. I hate people to do terrible things because they think they're right in doing them. It always makes them so smug. But when I thought it over I decided that I'd like to find out for myself whether he was married or not. I rather thought he was from things I've heard the girls say in school, but when you came along that night and told me he really was, I didn't believe it. I thought you and mother and father had thought it better to tell me that. So I went along with you all to Plainfield to see for myself."

"Then you weren't terribly surprised?" Winona asked thankfully.

"Oh, no," Florence answered with a little upward tilt to her chin. "When I first thought he might be, I made up my mind what I should do. I shall have a long talk with him when he returns to school."

Winona looked at her in wide-eyed surprise.

"A long talk?" she said. "About what, for goodness sake?"

"About us, of course," Florence said calmly. "I shall tell him exactly how I feel in the matter. By the way," she added, "will you send me that book of mine? I really couldn't show it to him that day before his wife, but I know there are some things in it that will interest him."

The gate opened then, and people started going through to the long waiting train. A red-capped porter took Florence's bag and she turned to kiss Winona.

But Winnie sharply took hold of her by the arm. She felt that she couldn't let her go this way, thinking, as she doubtlessly did, that Professor Joyce was still in love with her. It hardly seemed possible that she could be so dull as to not realize that he loved his wife and children only.

"Florence," Winona said sternly, "Professor Joyce is married. He loves his wife and children, he doesn't love you. I know this is true. Please try to believe me."

It was one of the hardest things that Winona had ever done. But she never flinched when she had a duty to perform. Camp Fire rules had helped her in this, and now her duty seemed to be to make this stubborn little sister

of hers see the truth about things. She still held her firmly by the arm.

Florence turned on her angrily, and tried to shake off her detaining hand.

"I've seen through it all," she cried hotly. "I've seen how you all tried to make me think he didn't love me. I knew you thought I was coming to you as a flapper who had to be saved from herself. You were surprised when you found that I'd been saved already. I told you that I knew you planned that trip because you wanted to be noble. And you asked that silly Andrew boy to go because you thought he'd be my own age and amuse me. As though I could ever be amused by the silly ragging of that baby! When I've had real conversations with a grown-up man with a mind! I took off my net and powdered my nose and went out on deck to watch the lights because I wanted to watch you smiling and nodding your virtuous heads and feeling like saints inside of you, because you'd been so smart to bring Andrew. I can just hear Billy saying, "He's just the boy to amuse Florence." Oh, I hated you all with all my heart! Why don't you leave me alone, I don't want to be changed!"

Winona tried once more to change her attitude, but she didn't feel that she had made the slightest dent in the armor of Florence's

conceit. The station man was crying, "All aboard!" for the last time when she finally loosened her hold on Florence's arm and watched her run down the concourse followed by the porter. Winona waited, thinking perhaps that Florence would turn at the last minute and give her some little sign to show that peace was restored, but Florence flounced into the train and never looked back.

Winona went home and cried herself into a small-eyed, red-faced rather plain girl. All her plans had fallen through. She hadn't been able to help her mother one little bit. Florence was just where she started from before she came to New York.

The others were kindly sympathetic and inclined to not take it as seriously as Winona did.

"She'll have to get over it," Tom said. "Professor Joyce will tell her himself that he doesn't love her when she goes to have her long talk with him."

"I wonder if even he can persuade her that she isn't a home-wrecker?" Louise said thoughtfully.

But a week later a calm letter came from Florence.

"I hate to be planned about," she wrote, "as you ought to know by this time. I'm sorry

we had that scene at the station for you did try to make my visit a pleasant one, but I wanted you to know that I wasn't a baby and could see through your plans. I don't know whether I thanked you or not for your hospitality. I do now, if I didn't before.

"I'll tell you something that will cheer you all, especially Billy, who really tried harder than the rest of you to throw us together I don't think Andrew is a baby. He is really quite old and has a very good mind when you get to know him well. He came up to see me, and father and mother liked him and he stayed to dinner. As for Professor Joyce, I shall keep my friendship for him. I had a talk with him as I told you I would and somehow I didn't find him as interesting as he had been before. He seemed stodgy.

"I wish you'd send me the book as I asked you. There is something in it that I want to show to Andrew. He says I didn't write about that evening we went to see 'The Bat.' Of course I did, so I want to collect the box of candy he bet me that I didn't. Please send it soon."

Winona looked at Louise when they finished reading the letter together. She had gone to her own room to read it and found

Louise there so she had shared it with her, sitting next to her on the window seat.

"It's just been Florence's stiff-neckedness, all the time!" Louise said. "I believe the lesson worked but wasn't it a hard one to teach her?"

"You'll never know how hard!" Winona said in mock tragic tones of a self-made martyr.

"I wish we'd waited a couple of years to be born," Louise said a little later, reading bits of the letter over again. "The younger generation is certainly wonderful. Somehow I feel that we've been cheated out of our birthrights when I see them making such capital out of theirs."

"The war did something to the children who were growing up at that time," a new voice said. It was Tom who had wandered into the room attracted by the sound of the girls' voices.

"We weren't so grown up ourselves," Winona said.

"But I guess our insides were," Louise said pensively. I know that none of us would dare to do the things that some of these Y. G. creatures do."

"Y. G. is good," Tom said, laughingly.

"Well, I'm glad that the child has sense," he added later after finishing Florence's letter,

which Winona had handed him to read. "Twenty or thirty years ago she would have been left to pine alone on the parent stem if this had happened to her. Now, she looks around and takes the nicest looking boy she can find and proceeds in this case, to drown her broken pride in his red hair and deep dimples."

"Such a poetic soul as yours should make money," Louise said jeeringly. "Why don't you write some poems?"

Tom thought a moment then he stood up and walked over to the doorway. He leaned against the side and recited;

There was a young lady named Flo
Who once had a black-headed beau.
He said "I am married;
Too long have I tarried."
"I like red hair better!" said Flo.

"That's terrible," teased Louise. "I could do better than that myself."

"Let's hear you!" cried Tom. The three of them went down to the living room and spent the rest of the evening making up limericks, and the prize for the best one was a piece of chocolate which Tom found in his overcoat pocket, and which he ate up himself!

CHAPTER SEVEN

TIME passes quickly when you are busy. The girls in the midst of the happenings of the Garnett Neighborhood House hardly realized that it was time for their summer vacation. In fact, they hadn't thought of it at all until one day Mr. Collins called Louise into his office. She was dressed in her playground costume, which consisted of a white middy blouse and a dark blue shirt, and as she seated herself by the side of his desk he shook his head and smiled.

"You don't look as though you needed a vacation," he said. "Does she?" he asked his secretary, who swung around in her typewriter chair and smiled too, as she looked at the pretty color in Louise's cheeks. It was a blowy June day and Louise had been umpiring an exciting base-ball game between the Garnett team and a visiting team from another Neighborhood House. She looked very pretty sitting there, her grey eyes clear and bright and cheeks becomingly flushed.

"Vacation?" she asked somewhat dazedly. "Is it really time for one?"

Mr. Collins laughed. "I wish all the

workers felt that way," he said ruefully. "They sometimes seem to only live for their vacations."

"Well, I'll confess that now you have suggested the idea, I rather like it," she said with her frank smile.

"If that's the case I suppose we'll have to give you one," he went on, and looked at the vacation schedule for the staff, he had before him, on the desk. "When would you like to take it?"

"If it wouldn't interfere too much with your plans, I'd like to go at the same time as Miss Merriam. You see we go up home together, but if you would be inconvenienced by having us both away at the same time—"

But Mr. Collins interrupted her.

"That's exactly what Miss Merriam said about ten minutes ago. I thought I'd ask you too, to see if you wanted to go with *her,* before I made arrangements for you both."

Louise smiled, for she knew he was teasing her, for the staff of the Garnett House knew of the girls' friendship. In fact they were teased about it a great deal.

"If you could arrange it we'd love it," she said and stood up ready to go back to the playground.

"I'll see what can be done," he said kindly,

and Louise knew that he meant it. But it might be that he would not be able to find substitutes to take both their places, and she was afraid to plan too much.

But Winona told her the next day, when they were having lunch together, in the library, that Mr. Collins had told her that morning that they could have the month of July.

"We'll go home for a while," said Winona contentedly, eating a minced olive and sardine sandwich. The girls found it much cheaper to bring their lunches with them from the Little Crooked House's larder than to go to restaurants for them.

"You know we said we'd go to that pretty village we passed through, the time we went furniture hunting with Charles and all of them last year, if our families could spare us for a week or two during our vacation," Louise said.

"I'd forgotten all about it," Winona answered. "But let's do it, that is if we can. I'll want to write mother and ask her first if she'd mind, before I make any plans. It might hurt her if I didn't spend all my vacation with her."

"I'll write home too," Louise agreed. "It

was a darling village with a quaint little old hotel where we said we'd like to stop."

"I do remember it," Winnie replied. "And think of it, Winnie, having a whole month to play in! It seems almost too good to be true."

"It's funny, when you think of it, how much your mental attitude has to do with your physical feelings," Louise said later.

"I didn't feel that I needed a vacation until Mr. Collins told me yesterday that it was time for one, and ever since I've been like a wilted flower and a vacation seems to be the only thing that will revive me."

That night they talked it over with Tom and Charles and Helen.

Tom, the practical, said: "You'd better go to Thorndale first."

"Why?" demanded Louise.

"Always save the nicest thing for the last," he said, squinting up his eyes to look at her through the dense cloud of blue smoke issuing from Charles' pipe and of which he was unsuccessfully trying to make smoke rings.

"I see," Louise said smiling at him. "It's like saving the vanilla for the last when you like it best when you have Neapolitan ice-cream."

"Exactly, dear child," Tom replied.

"And the nicest part of your vacation will be going home when I'm there. I heard today that I could have the last two weeks in July. We working men cannot expect more, can we?" he said in an aside to Charles; then turned back to the girls. "I'm planning to spend my vacation up home so if you wait until then, you'll have the pleasure of my society along with seeing your devoted parents and friends too."

"It all depends upon what mother says when she answers my letter," Winona said. "If she wants me to spend it all with her, I'll do it."

The Lanes and the Merriams probably had a conference for both girls received their answers the same day and both families told them to go anywhere they wanted for the first two weeks of July. So they made reservations at the small hotel they had seen in Thorndale and then with difficulty settled down to wait for The Day, as Winona called it, until Tom objected, saying she sounded like a small German. So she changed it to The First.

Billy Lee had gone down south again after the Easter vacation, but he came north in June, and much to everyone's surprise secured a position in a law office and settled down to

spend the summer in town. He was to live with Tom in the Little Crooked House while the girls were away.

When The First finally came, Billy and Tom took the girls down to the station to see them off. On their way down the stairs to the lower level where they were to get the train for Thorndale, a girl brushed by Tom and Louise who were walking ahead, and not raising her eyes to see where she was going walked right into Billy's arms outstretched to protect Winona.

She threw her head back angrily. As she did so Winona saw her face.

"Sonia!" she said, and at the word, Louise turned and came back to them.

"My friend!" cried the girl, taking both of Winona's hands in hers and holding them against her breast. "My dear, dear friend!"

It was the same intense Sonia Levitszky, but she seemed better groomed than of old, for the white collars and cuffs which peeped out from the blue serge coat of her suit were spotlessly clean, although the serge suit itself was badly worn and shiny in spots.

Sonia Levitszky had been a brilliant little Russian Jewess with a wonderful power for organization, but no sense of good manners, no cleanliness nor self-control. Winona had

helped her as much as she could, but Sonia had found life hard to live without these things. By unobtrusive example and occasional bullyings, Winona had done much for her, with the result that Sonia loved and respected Winnie more than she probably did anyone else in the world.

After greeting the others, she turned and paced along with them, still holding firmly to Winona's hand. They had lost track of her for a time and now she clung pathetically to them. Where were they going? How long would they be away? How lucky they were to be having a long month together! She was working on a newspaper now. Not a large daily but a smaller sheet. In fact it was named after the part of New York whose residents it catered to. She was only working there temporarily. Later she expected to get on another paper. She told them all this, and more, in short jerky sentences.

Tom asked her what paper she expected to get on, but she turned her large eyes to him with a look as if he had pierced her to her heart with the question, and said:

"I cannot tell you yet."

"All right," he answered shortly. "I happen to be on one myself, that was all, and I wondered if I could help you."

"I take help from no one!" she answered rudely. "I have always walked alone and I still shall."

Winona looked unhappy. She hated to have to start bringing Sonia up as soon as she met her, but she had been rude.

"Sonia," she said, "I don't think that was a kind way to answer Tom. He was only trying to help you."

"Kindness!" Sonia said tragically. "I do not know it, therefore I cannot practice it for others. Who has ever been kind to me but you, my friend Winona?"

"Oh, lots of people have tried," Winnie answered. "The trouble with you, Sonia, is that you don't give them a chance to be nice. Look at the way you just answered Tom."

Louise walked slowly over to the newsstand and Billy followed her. When they were out of earshot she turned to him and said:

"I never have the patience with Sonia that Winnie has. I always want to slap her when she reaches this stage of the game. I guess I must resent her cool way of monopolizing the conversation and taking it for granted that we are only waiting with bated breath to hear of her silly adventures."

"Sonia seems to have deteriorated," Billy said seriously. "She never had any manners,

but she *was* sincere and honest. This Sonia seems to be playing to the gallery all the time, and doing it rather in a cheap way."

Louise sighed with relief. "It's a comfort to *sometimes* find a man who sees a girl as you do, yourself!"

"Winnie certainly has the patience of Job sometimes," Billy said, looking back at the group which consisted of Tom who seemed to be throwing distress signals to them, and Winona and Sonia who had again taken Winona's hands and was pumping them up and down, as though she was using them to drive in a special point she was explaining.

"She's more of an 'I shall' than ever," Louise went on, disgustedly watching them from afar. "I shall do this—and I shall do that—and did you hear her saying that she shall come down to the Garnett House and start a school of journalism, as soon as we get back? I didn't hear even Winnie being particularly enthusiastic over that idea, but that won't make any difference to Sonia. She'll be down there just the same, and in a month or two she'll have a little band of Bolshevics all trained to throw bombs all over our nice new Neighborhood House we've just had painted!"

Billy laughed.

"Cheer up!" he said, "Don't jump over the moon until you come to it. Lots can happen in a month and especially if you work on a paper like Sonia. Maybe she'll be arrested and carefully put in jail before we see her again."

"No such luck!" she said half laughing, "And for goodness sake, whatever is she doing now?"

Billy looked as Louise directed. Sonia was leaning on Winona's arm, but looking up into Tom's face with an expression that Louise had never seen before.

"Gosh! I think she's vamping old Tom!" Billy said uttering a long whistle under his breath.

"I think she's perfectly silly," Louise said angrily.

"I think Tom's liking it," Billy said stealing a look at Louise from the corner of his eye to see how she would take his ragging.

Winona, looking all around, caught their eyes just then, and sent them a save-me-if-you-can-look. They went immediately over to her and Billy picked up her bag.

"We'll have to hurry," Louise said, taking Winona's arm and hurrying her along. "Perhaps we'd better say goodbye here, Sonia, for it is almost time the train left and you

might get caught on it if you came aboard. The boys could jump off alright."

Sonia frowned as she loosened her hold on Winnie's arm.

"Louise doesn't seem to want me," she said sadly."

"As usual, making an insult out of everything anyone says that isn't about her cleverness." Louise muttered under her breath, dropping Winona's arm too, and walking ahead.

Winona stood still looking quite distressed.

"Please don't make everything so hard, Sonia," she said "Louise wants you to come, of course, but it would be tragic if you got left on the train."

But Sonia decided that she had been wounded, so it took the combined efforts of Winona and Tom and Billy to appease her. Louise walked ahead, entirely aloof, and refusing to have a hand in bringing her around.

The train was almost ready to pull out when they finally boarded it and they had to climb on any old way and dump their bags down. The boys jumped off and Louise and Winona stood on the rear platform and waved to them until they were out of sight.

The last glimpse they had of Sonia, she was standing between the boys holding an arm

of each and looking, as Louise said, anything but sorry that she was being left alone with them.

"I don't like that girl," said Louise the downright, turning away to enter the car. "I think she's too silly for words and she's so sensitive that I can't get along with her. We're never able to talk for five minutes without tears on her part and thoughts of murder and sudden death, on mine."

"She *has* got an unfortunate disposition," Winona agreed, "but think how uncomfortable she must feel inside of herself; and what a hard time she has had."

"She doesn't seem to mind what the boys say to her," Louise said stoutly. "It's only what I say that seems to set her off."

"Look at the way she jumped at Tom," Winnie went on. "He was only trying to help her and she was awfully rude."

"She seemed to be looking upon him as a deliverer, the last view I had of her," Louise said very crossly for her.

"She was telling us all about the troubles she's been having lately," Winona explained. "Her mother is very ill. She has something very serious the matter with her and may die any minute. And Sonia thinks she may have to leave the paper she's working on, because

the man who owns it, or whatever they do with a small paper like that—is trying to make love to her."

"Fiddle dee dee!" Louise said somewhat rudely. "I bet she told you that story before Tom. I know that type of girl so well. They are always having perfectly terrible times with men, wherever they go. You and I are never troubled that way Winnie, and we are certainly prettier than Sonia, at least you are."

Winona couldn't help laughing. Disgust was so plainly registered by Louise's little tip-tilted nose, that it seemed turned up more than ever.

"Well goodness knows," she said, hoping to change the subject that seemed to be bothering Louise so much.

"I try to vamp people," Louise continued. "I've rolled my eyes at Roger and Billy and Tom in turn and all they ever do is howl. Of course I don't mind Tom howling, he's liable to do anything, but for Roger to do it and Billy, who is supposed to have the charming Harvard manner along with his William and Mary one, I think it is a shame. I believe I'll try it on someone new."

"Mr. Collins, for instance," Winona suggested demurely, dearly loving a joke and seeing that Louise was trying to turn the course of

conversation away from Sonia. They both laughed at this, for Mr. Collins would have probably howled as loud and long as the boys themselves if Louise had tried it on him.

The laugh made them feel better and they settled themselves comfortably in the chair car with magazines and books which Billy had bought for them. It was a five hour trip on the train to the nearest railroad town to Thorndale and from the station they were to take an automobile to Thorndale, a distance of about eighteen miles.

The country was lovely and once on their way, leaving the crowded streets of uptown New York behind them, they soon came to the pretty Westchester County towns. For miles, on either side of the track were walls and walls of pale pink and deep red cottage roses.

"I should love to come home to a station like that one," Louise said enthusiastically, pointing to a particularly pretty rustic one which they were passing. "Wasn't it a clever thought of someone to plant all those roses, or do you think they've grown wild?"

Winona didn't know, but she thought it was a happy idea, whether they were cultivated or wild. After a while Louise leaned back in her chair and simply sat with her hands folded,

looking at the pretty pictures the windows framed but making no effort to see more.

"I hadn't any idea how nice it is to just sit," she said to Winona who looked up from her book to smile at her. "I'm so tired of playing with children, swinging them and teaching them to be sporting in games and not take it out on the visiting combatants, if they should happen to lose. Sometimes I feel that I'll never be able to talk to a really grown-up person again, and I'm sure if I played golf or tennis with Billy or Tom I'd be watching them every minute and holding myself ready to spring on them if they crowed over me."

Winona put down her book and leaned her head back.

"I know how you feel exactly," she said. "Sometimes the library children used to worry me to death. It is so hard to have to always watch the moral effect of everything you do or say to them. There have been times, and lo be it spoken, when I've wished I could let them pick up a book and fling it at their little friends' heads, or wet their little fingers so that they could turn the pages more easily. It's a wonder they didn't hate me sometimes."

"Hate you!" Louise said, "they adored the ground you walked on, poor babies."

It was after they returned from luncheon

in the diner that Louise took out her time-table and began to count the stations they would pass through before they came to the one they wanted.

Suddenly she dropped the time-table in her lap and looked across at Winona with wide-opened eyes of excitement.

"Winnie!" she said. "Something has just occurred to me! You'll die when I tell you."

"Hurry up!" Winnie cried impatiently.

"We never opened that locked box we found the time we were looking for old furniture with Charles and Helen!"

"Louise!" Winnie cried in her turn. "How perfectly stupid of us! And we always wished that we could find a perfectly good secret something or other, and the very first one we found we forgot all about! But whatever made you think of it now?"

"I guess it was because my mind was resting," Louise tried to explain. "I don't know how it happened. I was reading the time-table and I began to think of Thorndale and the last time we went through it in the car with the funny piece of the Vernis-Martin cabinet sticking out of the back of the car, and then I remembered you and how you rode all the way with something on your lap, and at first I couldn't remember what it was you held and

then all of a sudden it came to me. It was the old locked box which you insisted upon carrying yourself."

"Oh, Louise," said Winona. "I wish we could turn right around and go back and get it. But I think I know why we didn't open it. Charles took it away from me that night when we got home and I was so tired the next day that I forgot to ask him about it, and then Billy came along with his invitation to go south for Christmas and Roger wanting a companion for his mother and we all being so busy with the Little Crooked House, and I had to make so many decisions as to what was the best to do...."

"You don't have to make any excuses to me!" Louise said, half laughing. "I, at least, might have remembered it, for I didn't have two boys wanting companions for their mothers in the worst way, when the mothers had perfectly good daughters of their own, because the boys wanted me in their homes and couldn't get me there any other way!"

"Oh, hush!" Winona said coloring prettily. "You've all teased me enough about that! One of these days I'll go over to England or down south just to show you all. And I'll be such a charming companion to Lady Mendon that a duke or a count or a

marquis will want to marry me and when I go riding in my presentation robes in a golden coach like Cinderella's you'll be glad to know me, and you'll wish that you had come with me, as I'll be asking you to do if I ever go myself," she ended up irreverently.

"And Roger and Billy Lee will be sitting around with broken hearts and long faces and wanting me to sympathize with them," Louise continued teasingly.

"I don't know about that!" Winona said, "Perhaps Sonia will console them."

"That's right," Louise said with a little frown. "We left that Bolshevic with our unsuspecting males, didn't we?"

"And they seemed to be having a good time and enjoying it," Winona went on.

"I don't think she had to hold Tom's arm as tightly as she was doing," Louise said.

"Nor Billy's either," laughed Winona.

"Laugh, my young friend," Louise said in mock tragic tones. "But remember that Louise Lane told you that girl will bring grief and danger into your life."

"Since when have you developed this new power of reading the future?" Winona inquired. "If the worse comes to the worst and we lose our money we'll dress you up as a gypsy and get you a tent and you can tell

fortunes for two dollars a head or a heart or whatever you like."

"Very well, proud lady," went on Louise. "But remember the gypsy's warning!"

Winona began to giggle and they kept up their bantering until suddenly the train gave a tremendous jerk and then stopped all together and Louise and Winona, after picking up the books which had fallen from their laps, looked around anxiously to see if anything had happened. But a stout white-haired conductor sat placidly in the last seat of the car, counting the pink and white and blue tickets he had collected and seeming to be entirely unaware of the past jolt. He looked so comfortable sitting there that the girls felt reassured and looked at one another and laughed.

The train began to crawl along again and an anxious little woman sitting across the aisle, and sharing her chair with a little girl and a baby asked Louise if everything was all right now. Winona, at the sound of a stranger's voice, swung her chair around and discovered that the little girl, who was only a size larger than the baby in the woman's arms, was holding one tiny thumb very tightly and trying her best to keep from crying.

In a second Winona had leaned across and had taken the child on her lap. She examined

the thumb which she found to be bruised by the fall the little girl had had when the train had stopped so suddenly. It was badly swollen and discolored.

The little woman almost cried when she saw it. Just then the baby began to really cry and she tried to console it. Winona smiled reassuringly at her.

"I'll fix it," she said, "don't worry about it." and she took the little girl into the dressing-room at the end of the train and held the small thumb under the ice-water tap for a few minutes, then she took out a bottle of peroxide which she used for her nails, and made a neat little wet bandage of her hankerchief which she tore up for the purpose.

All the time that she had been doing this the little girl never cried. She eyed Winona with her big brown eyes and watched everything she did with the deepest interest. She evidently decided that here was a friend, for she seemed to give herself entirely into Winnie's safe keeping.

When they went back to the car she showed the woman the wet bandage and then came over and sat on Winnie's lap. Louise had, in the meanwhile, persuaded the oldest child, a boy who had had a chair to himself, to come over to her and now she was sharing her

seat with him and showing him pictures in one of the magazines.

The little woman leaned comfortably back in her chair and seemed to be resting for the first time on her trip. Once or twice she smiled across at the girls.

Winona, in her best story teller manner, began the story of Cinderella. The little girl whose name was Matilda, looked up at her solemnly when she was finished, thanked her politely and said:

"My father tells us that story. I wish my father was here now!" And for the first time since she had hurt herself she began to cry, soft little baby sobs that shook her tiny body from head to foot.

"Please don't darling," Winona whispered, "Look sweetheart, you are making John feel badly too, and if you do that it will make your mother unhappy and she is so tired."

Matilda tried to check her sobs and Winona kept her chair swung around to the window so that the woman across the aisle knew nothing of what was going on. The noise of the train drowned any sound.

After a little, Matilda sat up and said in her quaint little way:

"That isn't my mother. I'm going to see my mother. That's Annie, and that's Annie's

baby. She comes for us when its time for us to leave father and go live with mother again. I wish I could stay with them both, all the time. My mother is pretty. She's all black and red and white like Snowwhite in the fairy tale. My father tells me that story too."

"Poor little baby," Winona thought, hugging Matilda very closely. "I wish something could be done."

The colored porter came through the train collecting baggage and Louise leaned over and told Winnie that the next stop was theirs. They had barely time to go into the dressing room and adjust their hats before the train stopped and they had to hurry out. As they went down the platform looking for a car to take them to Thorndale they saw the children and the little woman with the baby hurrying along in front of them.

"I wonder if their mother will meet them?" Louise said, for John had told her the story also. "Perhaps we'll be able to see her."

CHAPTER EIGHT

In the excitement of getting an automobile to take them and their baggage to Thorndale, they forgot, for the moment, all about looking for the children and their mother. But after they were settled in the back of a very dilapidated Ford, whose owner promised to take them the eighteen miles for five dollars, they looked around and found that in the car parked next to theirs was John and Matilda and Annie with her baby. They were evidently waiting for someone. It wasn't a hired car, that was plain to be seen. It was as well groomed looking as a lovely woman, and a chauffeur was sitting at the wheel.

Winona turned her head to look across the Main Street to a line of two-story buildings which seemed to hold the principal stores of the town. There was a butcher and a baker, but instead of a candle-stick maker, a blue sign with white lettering Western Union office. As she looked, a woman came out of the telegraph office and across the street to the car where Matilda and John were waiting.

She was a lovely woman to look at, tall and graceful and red and white and black, exactly

like Snowwhite in the fairy tale. Matilda had been right in her description of her mother. And she seemed so glad to see the children. They clung to her and she fussed anxiously over Matilda's thumb, just as the girls thought that she ought to do, she bundled them all back into the car and dropped a kiss upon the tiny wrinkled face of Annie's baby.

As she was about to tell the chauffeur that they were ready to start, Matilda recognized the girls, still sitting in the back of the Ford waiting for their driver to collect the mail and do some errands for the people who lived out Thorndale way. She pointed a fat little finger at Winona and told her mother all about her thumb, and what Winnie had done for it, and how she had even told her fairy tales. John, not to be outdone and see his friend Louise neglected, joined his voice with Matilda's in admiration of the girls.

"Snowwhite" got out of her car and came over to them.

"My name is Alice Whitney," she said. "Thank you so much for taking care of my babies. You seem to have won their deepest love and respect." She smiled at the girls whimsically, as she spoke.

"They are darlings!" Louise said impulsively.

Mrs. Whitney smiled again. "They *are* dears," she said, and added, "The children and I are living in a house about three miles the other side of Thorndale. If you are ever lonely, though I don't suppose you will be with one another, I'd be delighted to have you come out and be lonely with me. I am very often that way."

"We'd love to come," Winnie said with her friendly smile, and added, "Though we probably won't be lonely. We'll have a lot to do in the two weeks we're going to be here. You see we're only on a vacation."

"Well, come anyway," Mrs. Whitney said lightly. "Please don't forget all about John and Matilda and me. We shall be waiting to see you again."

The owner of the Ford had by this time tied all the parcels on all the imaginable places on the front of the car, and had climbed into his place behind the wheel. Mrs. Whitney said goodbye and went back to her own car and the last the girls saw of her and the children, the three of them were looking through the glass window in the rear and waving to them.

"Isn't it nice to have a friend here already?" Louise said.

"And she's a darling too," Winona said

enthusiastically. "I don't see how a man could ever possibly leave her and those children."

"I don't either," Louise agreed, in a comfortable way she had, and added, "I don't feel as much like a twin Columbus as I did when I first started. I wonder if he was as glad to make friends with the first Indians?"

But Winnie didn't answer her. She was too busy holding on to the side of the car, for the little Ford seemed to be standing on its nose, so steep was the hill down which it was going.

"This is the life in the great mountains!" Louise said clutching at her hat and bracing herself.

But when they got to the bottom, the road ran along smoothly for a way. On one side was a river, a regular story-book river that wound in among the trees like a silver ribbon. The water seemed to be as smooth as the proverbial mill-pond, and only a floating leaf or a skating water-bug broke the surface of it.

It was about three o'clock when the girls, in the rattling little Ford, came to the outskirts of the village of Thorndale. A long, slow climb, brought them to the top of the hill and here the driver stopped and turned to the girls in the rear seat, pointing below.

In the valley at the Ford's rubber-tired

feet was a village. Little white houses, looking as though they had been taken out of a child's play box and dropped anywhere, were scattered about in a radius of a mile and a half. Two white church steeples stood proudly taller than the surrounding buildings, their slender points vieing with the trees.

"There's Thorndale" said the driver proudly. "Ain't she a pretty place?"

The girls said indeed it was, and then with a whirl and a sudden start which made the girls make frantic clutches at their hats, the Ford coasted down the steep road.

"I can't balance my hat any longer," Louise said, taking it off. "The natives may as well get used to seeing me without it now, as any time, and beside they won't have any comparison to go by, if they never see how much better I look with it on." She braced her feet against the front seat and said, "Now I can enjoy this triumphant entry in peace and happiness." And with nothing more to bother her, she leaned back and looked from side to side, turning her head so swiftly that Winona declared it made her dizzy and begged her to stop.

It was truly a triumphal entry, for the driver of the Ford blew his horn loudly and long, and the Ford, as if in answer to his Mas-

ter's voice, rattled and banged louder than ever. They passed a church yard, quiet and sleepy; a white school house, so exactly like a school house in motion pictures that Winona and Louise looked at one another and smiled.

"Where is the beautiful teacher standing in the doorway with a group of frizzled hair youngsters around her?" Louise asked in a stage whisper.

"Perhaps its lunch time and she'll be around the next bend, with the oldest boy in the class," Winona whispered back.

"School had been closed for a long time," said the driver, not looking back at all, but evidently an interested listener to everything they said. Louise looked at Winnie and raised her eyebrows. After that they kept quiet until they came to the hotel.

It was a long low building, the main wing dating back to the early fifties. On either side and at the back additional wings had been built. The girls liked the woman who came down to meet them. She was small and wiry and her eyes, though black and beady as a bird's were kind. She wore a neat print dress and her brown hair was screwed up into a little knot at the back of her head. In spite of the tightness a few curls grew prettily at the back of her neck and on her forehead.

They followed her through a low ceiling living room and down a narrow dark hall. Here they stopped while the woman knocked on a closed door at the right hand side of the passage. A deep gruff voice answered the knock and the girls drew back. It was a frightening voice. The door opened and a loosely built big man came out. The light was behind him and his face in shadow, so it wasn't until he had carried the bags up and deposited them upon the floor in the room they were to share together, that they saw his face. He was one of the meekest looking people they had ever seen. Blue eyes, overshadowed by brows that should have belonged to a bully of a man, looked out shyly upon the world. His features were finely moulded and he was good-looking as so many of the farmers in New York state are. And when Winnie thanked him for unbuckling a particularly hard buckle, he smiled the sweetest, little boy smile that she had ever seen. She liked him on the spot.

When he left them, the woman proprietor still lingered. She smocthed out imaginary wrinkles in the snow-white counterpanes, and flicked imaginary flecks of dust away from the spotless table. The room was immaculate, and the two large beds looked comfortable and refreshing in their white covers.

"Wouldn't Charles and Helen eat those beds if they saw them?" Winona asked, going over to the bureau and removing her hat.

"Wouldn't they!" Louise said. "Well, I'm certainly glad they can't see them tonight for they'd try to buy them right out from under us, and they do look so comfortable that I'd like to sleep in one tonight anyway."

The two beds *were* beauties. One, a massive wooden affair had an elaborately carved head-board. The other was an old boat-bed. A heavily carved bureau matched the larger one. It looked so solid standing on its short fat legs that it seemed hardly possible that someone had ever been strong enough to move it into the room. It seemed as if a workman had come to the room every day for years and built and carved it where it now stood.

"What a lovely set it is," Winona said to Miss Latimer, who by now, being thoroughly satisfied that the girls had enough towels, that there were really no wrinkles or dust anywhere, was walking toward the door.

She stopped, and smiled at Winnie as she answered.

"Those two pieces were part of the set that was made for my great aunt when she was married. I'm glad you like them. Some

folks think they're heavy and ugly but my sister and I think they're right handsome."

"They are beautiful," Winona said enthusiastically, rubbing her hand over the heavy carving on the frame of the mirror.

Miss Latimer smiled again and turned to go.

"Supper's at six," she said, "And the dining room is right at the foot of the stairs."

Louise went out to look up the bathroom and came back with the news that it was the most modern bathroom she'd ever seen and that she was going immediately to take a bath. There were heaps of snowy thick towels she said; and she left Winnie to unpack her bag and get things straightened while she waited her turn.

It was a delightful surprise to find a bathroom so beautifully fitted, in such an old house, and the girls felt rested and refreshed after their baths, when at six o'clock they went down to the low-ceilinged dining room, for their supper.

The next morning they started out to explore the country. They found one delightful road leading to the river and they walked slowly along, fully enjoying the feeling of absolutely having nothing to do but amuse themselves for two weeks. As they turned a

somewhat sharp corner they came upon a little house and they both stopped short to look at it.

"It's exactly like the house Peter, Peter, Pumpkin-eater built for his wife when he found he couldn't keep her!" cried Louise.

It *was* round and yellow and quite like a pumpkin shell. There was something about the little square window panes and the old worn door-sill that stamped it at once as having been somebody's home, and a very nice home at that. There had doubtlessly been hollyhocks in the garden and tall sunflowers had grown against the western wall. There were traces of them still growing bravely among the choking weeds. There was a raggedy rose-bush over the front porch, a tiny square porch, hardly big enough to hold anything but one person at a time.

The rose-bush seemed to be trying its best to hide the fact that one of the porch pillars needed to be repaired badly. Panes of glass were out of some of the square little windows, but instead of giving the old house a dilapidated look, the black holes looked only like dark colored eye-glasses which had been put on to keep out the glare of the sun. Indeed it seemed to be as jolly and happy a little house as could be found anywhere.

"I think it is empty; what a shame!"

Louise said. "I'm going to see if I can look inside."

She walked up the little flagged front walk and up onto the tiny porch and tried to peep into the hallway through the dust-covered panes of the side lights in the front door.

"I can't see anything," she called back to Winona who stood in the roadway. "Come and see if you can."

Winona came dutifully up as she was asked, but couldn't see anything either, so they went around to the side of the house and looked into what probably had been the family living room.

"Why there's an old man in there!" Louise whispered and they took another look.

The old man was sitting in the only chair the room contained. There was a lovely old grand piano in one corner however, and two bookcases filled to overflowing with brown-backed books.

"Perhaps we'd better go," Winnie said, backing softly away from the window.

"I'd like to talk to him," Louise said, taking another look before following her friend. "He looks so sad and lonely."

"I think we'd better ask about him before we do anything like that," Winnie said with her usual common sense. And Louise agreed.

They were sitting around the white china shaded lamp which stood in the middle of the parlor table, that evening when Louise introduced the subject of the old man.

Miss Latimer brought her embroidery which she did beautifully, and sat with them after the supper dishes were cleared away. The rest of the boarders; (there were one or two married couples with children), were out taking their usual evening walk. The girls had noticed that they were the kind of people who want to get the greatest benefit possible from their vacations and therefore live on a schedule of walks, and mountain climbing and seeing the "sights," as they called the lovely scenery.

"It's a wonder their bones and muscles don't sit right down and say they won't go another step," Louise said to Winnie, as they stood in the doorway earlier in the evening, watching the departure of the strenuous ones. "If they told their poor stiff muscles what violent exercise they were going to give them, I bet they'd flatly refuse to start at all from their comfortable homes in the great cities, where the greatest exertion they know is a walk to the subway or to market."

"I'm afraid they thought we were rude because we didn't join them when they asked us," Winona said doubtfully. "But I'm so

glad of a chance to rest after running up and down stairs all day long in the Garnett House that I simply couldn't go out again tonight."

"I'd much rather stay with Miss Latimer, anyway," Louise said with her usual frankness.

So they went back into the cosily lighted parlor and sewed and rocked and were happy while they listened to Miss Latimer's stories, as she sewed and rocked too, in a true story teller's way.

"I guess you mean old Mr. Van Horne," she said in answer to Louise's question concerning the man they had seen that morning in the sparsely furnished house. "He's been here with us for about eight years now and he's just about on his last legs, I'm afraid. We all take turns doing for him in the winter. Last winter Mrs. Layton had him into Sunday supper every week. He's a good eater, let me tell you, as old as he is!"

Winona almost said that he didn't look as though he was one of the village people, but she caught herself in time. Miss Latimer like others in the village, was quick to take offense if she thought anyone was criticizing the villagers. She loved a bit of gossip as well as the next one, but gossip indulged in by the villagers themselves was only considered news,

while the same thing discussed by strangers became slander and scandal.

"He was a city man," she said after a little while, looking at the girls over the top of her iron rimmed glasses. "His folks were country people, however. They lived over two towns from here. They owned a lot of property in these parts at one time. When his father was a young man he went down to the city and married a city girl and Mr. Van Horne was their only child. They brought him up here a couple of summers and he came to love our country. So when he grew up himself, he used to bring his wife and his son up here. They were as handsome a family as you'd find anywhere. But his wife died and he took to drink, lost everything he had except a small amount of money his wife had left directly to her son. That went to educate the the boy and he's studying medicine now, out West. The father came up here to live after the smash!"

"Why doesn't the son do something for his father?" Louise asked indignantly. She hadn't been able to forget the old man bent over his book, reading, as she had seen him that morning.

"Mr. Van Horne wouldn't tell his son if he was dying," Miss Latimer went on. "We

folks often thought we ought to write to him and tell him, and once the Woman's Aid decided to do it. But the old man got wind of it from somewhere and came in and broke up the meeting. It was the first time we ever saw him lose his temper and I can tell you I hope it is the last."

"Does he get any money from his son?" asked Louise. She recalled the scant furnishing of the living room and the idea came to her that it was from selling the pieces of furniture that he received money.

"I think so," Miss Latimer answered, but somewhat doubtfully. "We kind of like to help him out now and then," she went on, her kind middle-aged face bent over her work. "Some of us have bought pieces of furniture, and right nice things he has too."

"I thought as much," Louise said under her breath.

The other boarders returned just then and asked Louise to play for them while they took up the rag rugs and danced for an hour as a fitting crown to a vacation day, so this conversation ceased.

The next morning, armed with books, and a rug apiece, Winona and Louise went to a pine grove, which they had discovered the afternoon before, Louise spread out her rug

flat on the ground and lay on her back, her arms under her head, and looked up through the interlacing pine boughs to the summer sky, where little white clouds, looking as though they were smoke from some giant's pipe, were peacefully and slowly blowing along. Winona tried to drape her rug around a tree trunk so that she could sit up and read, and lean against the trunk, but it proved unsuccessful and she had given it up and now sat with her book and embroidery, which she had also brought along, spread out around her, looking anything but comfortable.

"I wish I could find a comfortable place to sit," she said looking around to see if she could by chance find a rock to rest against. But, although there were rocks they were not the right height for comfort and she got up and walked off a little way to see if she could find anything better. Louise, lying there and thinking of the old man, suddenly heard Winona's voice in conversation with someone. Whoever she was talking to managed to keep their voices very low for Louise could not catch any answers to the questions which Winona apparently was asking.

She sat up and looked all around. Still she could not see Winona and her companion, for they were hidden by a slight uprise in the

land behind the clump of trees under which she had been lying. She knew if she stood up she could see them, but she felt too lazy to make the effort, and so sat idly turning the pages of her book and wishing Winnie would hurry back and tell her who this new friend was.

"Perhaps it is some of the boarders who have followed us here and want us to climb Blue Head," she said, sighing at the thought of a steep climb, and again, more deeply still, at the thought of the exertion they would have to expend to keep up a conventional flow of talk about the beauties of Nature as they climbed. She wished she could bury her head like an ostrich, and mentally prayed that Winnie would head them off, if it were indeed people with climbing intentions.

"Here they come," she sighed, looking desperately around for a place to hide, and then, realizing that she couldn't forsake her friend, settling down again. The voices were coming nearer and she could now distinguish the deeper notes of a man's voice. So it was a man Winnie was talking to. That wasn't so bad, for they weren't as insistent as women she thought, and now she glanced over her shoulder to where they were coming toward her over the brown bed of crushed and fragrant pine needles.

It was old Mr. Van Horne to whom Winnie was talking so earnestly and as they neared her Louise stood up.

"This is my friend, Miss Lane," Winona said, introducing Louise who put out her hand in her friendly way.

Mr. Van Horne took it and smiled at her. In spite of his years, and the hard times he undoubtedly had been having lately, he seemed much younger than he had been when they saw him through the window, and his grey tweed suit, although rather shabby, was well cut and very well brushed and mended.

"Miss Merriam tells me that you are spending two weeks with us here in Thorndale," he said kindly. "I think that you will find it a delightful spot and the people delightful too."

"We love the people themselves," Louise answered. "But to tell the truth, we have been trying to hide from the boarders." And she described them so thoroughly that Mr. Van Horne laughed heartily.

"I know that kind well," he said. "They seem to come year after year. The first few summers I was up here I didn't know quite how to handle them, to get away from them without seeming to be very rude. I am very fond of fishing and they used to come in droves

and stand along the bank and watch me. I found it very annoying, for as wide as the river is, it wasn't wide enough to get away from their prying eyes. And finally I decided I could stand it no longer."

"What did you do?" Louise asked, her grey eyes twinkling. "Please tell us, perhaps we can do the same thing, if you wouldn't mind."

"I wouldn't mind," the old man answered dryly. "But I doubt if you could do it! I used to pretend that I was dumb. Now, there is no fun in watching a dumb fisherman. If you can't ask him how his luck is, and how the fishes are running, and what kind of bait he uses, and how much the fishes weigh, there's nothing to just standing and watching him sit silently in a boat, perhaps for an hour, without a bite. So they got so that they left me alone. And the villagers although they knew better, never told on me."

"Well," admitted Louise, half laughing. "It does seem like a drastic thing to have to do. I'm sure I'd forget and talk. Thank you very much for telling us, however, I'm afraid we'll have to think of some way of our own."

"I was afraid you would," Mr. Van Horne said.

He offered to show the girls a still more delightful and comfortable spot than the pine grove, and helped to carry their books and rugs. He led them across a brook and up a rather steep incline. As they reached the top and looked down they discovered that at their feet was a dell, a fairy dell taken bodily out of a fairy tale.

After he saw them comfortably settled he left them to enjoy it by themselves, which they immediately began to do. Winona found at once the rock she had been looking for, and draped her rug around it and settled down. Louise again spread her rug and lay, as before, with her arms under her head, looking up at the sky.

Suddenly she sat up and said: "Isn't he a dear!"

"I'd like to shake that good-for-nothing son!"

"But if he doesn't know anything about it because his father doesn't tell him, you can't blame him so much," Winnie said, puckering her eyebrows in thought. She could almost always see the other person's side of anything, far too well, she sometimes said.

"I should think if he had any kindness, he'd come over to see his father," Louise went on, paying no heed to her friend and still

denouncing the son. "Or if he'd ask his father to visit him," she added.

But Winona usually so sympathetic, somehow couldn't bring herself to blame the son entirely.

"I wish we could think of something to do about it," she said reflectively. "Perhaps if we try we will be able to find a plan."

They sat for a while longer then Louise looking at her wrist watch declared that if they wanted any lunch they'd have to run all the way home. They picked up their things and ran and arrived just as the other boarders, tired and hot looking, dragged themselves into the dining room.

Louise and Winona kept the secret of their fairy dell from everyone but Miss Latimer, who said she remembered it well. Indeed she added that it had been a favorite play place of her childhood and told the girls where they would find a natural spring.

That afternoon Winona took her traveling writing desk and went out under an apple tree which stood on a side lawn. She wrote a lengthy letter to Tom and a shorter one to her mother. Later she walked down the yellow dusty road and dropped them into the box just in time to catch the four o'clock stage.

Four days later she walked down to the

post-office again, but this time she received a fat letter which she read as she walked along, and smiled to herself as she did so. When she got back to the house she asked Miss Latimer if she had seen Louise anywhere around, and was told that she had gone out about half an hour before saying she was going for a walk along the river road. So Winnie, still clasping the fat letter, turned her steps to the river road and soon came to the pumpkin house. She had been amusing herself as she walked along by tracing Louise's foot-steps in the soft yellow dust and now she was surprised to find them leading to the front door. She still followed them and knocked at the door which was standing half open.

Mr. Van Horne's voice told her to come in and she pushed the door wide and stepped through. She found herself in a square hall and opening off it on the left hand side she saw a doorway leading to a long low living room, evidently the one through whose windows she and Louise had first seen Mr. Van Horne. His voice had come from that direction so she walked across and stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER NINE

Mr. Van Horne rose from the only chair the room possessed and came toward her.

"You young things are being very kind to me," he said as he bade her welcome and offered her the chair. She glanced around as she went over to sit down and discovered Louise sitting on an upturned box before the piano, which she had opened and was trying out. She was so engrossed in her soft playing that it was evident she did not know that someone had come into the room and Winona smiled and shook her head at the old man, who would have spoken to Louise to tell her of Winnie's arrival.

"May we go out on the porch?" Winnie said after a bit. "It is quite lovely and the sun shines so prettily through the green lattice there and makes such nice shadows on the floor."

"I'm glad you like the way those shadows fall," he said, as they seated themselves on one of the wooden built-in benches. "My wife was very fond of them too."

It was the first time he had ever mentioned his family to the girls and Winona wished he

would tell her more, and especially something about his son. But he didn't and they sat in silence listening to the soft little things Louise was playing on the old piano. In spite of it being out of tune, its tone was rich and mellow and Winnie knew that Louise was enjoying herself.

They must have sat there, quietly listening, for an hour or more and finally Winnie reluctantly stood up and said:

"I'm afraid I'll have to call Louise, for it's time we went home."

"I wish that I could tell you both how much I have enjoyed having you here," Mr. Van Horne said as he shook hands with them and then stood looking down on them as he stood on the upper step of the little porch.

"I've never played such a lovely piano," Louise said. "I enjoyed it, so much."

"You must come often then," he said smiling delightedly at her praise. "You'll always find the door on the latch, even if I am not here. If it really gives you pleasure I will be glad to have you play it."

She thanked him and they turned to go.

Out of sight of the little cottage, Winona drew from her bag the letter she had received from Tom and handed it to Louise, who eagerly read it through. Then she read a

yellow telegram which had also been enclosed in the envelope. This said:

"Remember you perfectly. Glad to hear from you. Train arrives at 5:10 Friday." It was signed:

"John Van Horne"

"But I don't understand it at all!" Louise said opening her grey eyes very wide in wonder and looking attentively at the telegram again, as if hoping to find the solution of the puzzle there. "Here is Tom's letter saying he did what you asked him to do and that he and Billy and John Van Horne will be up in the car Saturday. But when and how did Tom get to be friends with Mr. Van Horne's son John?"

"Don't you remember," explained Winona her eyes sparkling with the excitement of it all and the delight of watching Louise's surprise. "Don't you remember that Tom went out West last winter to get a special article about some Medical College? When he got back he told me he had met an awfully nice man who had helped him a lot to get the stuff he needed. Well, I remembered that when we came up here, and heard about Mr. Van Horne's son, and I remembered that Tom had said the man's name was John Van Horne and I knew that they had corresponded ever since.

So I wrote to Tom and told him everything and he telegraphed the son and is bringing him up with Billy Lee, Saturday."

"Oh, let me sit down to get all this!" cried Louise going over to the side of the road and sinking down on a mossy stone. "Winnie," she asked, looking up at her friend with an exaggerated air of deep respect, "tell me, was there ever a famous detective who was an ancestor of yours?"

Winnie laughingly shook her head.

"None that I ever heard of," she answered lightly. "But come on," she continued, giving Louise her hand to help her up from the stone, "we'll be late if we don't hurry."

Louise obediently got up and took Winnie's arm affectionately as they walked along.

"Really you are a wonder!" she said. "And won't Mr. Van Horne be surprised?"

"That's just it," Winona said with a slight frown. I'm afraid he may be too surprised. And one thing that worries me horribly is that bare house of his. Whatever will the son say when he finds it that way?"

"Serve him good and right!" Louise said bluntly. "It may do him good to find his father being so brave about the whole thing and it may make him ashamed of himself!"

But Winnie only shook her head thoughtfully and said nothing.

"Do you know what I'm planning to do?" Louise went on. "I found out this morning that Miss Brown, the music teacher up here, wants to go away for a week. She hasn't been able to find anyone to take her pupils so when Miss Dingman told me about it, I went over to see her and offered to take the children. And then I had my brilliant scheme. I'd take her pupils without any charge, if she would promise me that she would tell their parents they ought to practice on Mr. Van Horne's Steinway piano."

"But some of them have pianos of their own," Winnie objected, "What about them?"

"Oh, I found out that most of them did their practicing at Miss Brown's house," Louise explained. "Most of them haven't pianos, and what they want to learn to play for I can't tell you. The main thing is that they do; so instead of going to Miss Brown's they are to pay for the privilege on Mr. Van Horne's. That will make a nice little sum for him. Miss Brown has twenty pupils and she said she thought that even the families of the ones who own pianos will pay to have them practice out of the house. I know my mother and family would have taken up a collection

gladly to pay for me practicing down the other end of the village!"

"That's fine!" Winnie said enthusiastically.

"I'm going to get Jimmie Burroughs to tune it for me," Louise went on. Jimmie Burroughs was the man of all trades in Thorndale. He could do everything and where or when he learned how, no one could ever tell, for he had never been known to leave Thorndale even over night.

The next day when the girls went to the little brown house with Jimmie Burroughs, they found the door on the latch as Mr. Van Horne said it would be, but he was nowhere in sight.

For more than an hour Jimmie tinkered with the piano but finally he straighened up and came out to the girls where they were sitting on the steps of the porch talking.

"All done," he said shortly. "Want to try it?"

Louise immediately got up and went back with him into the house while Winnie sat and listened. Tuned, its notes sounded as soft and brilliant as ever. Louise played something over and Winnie sitting listening happily, began to idly think of how lovely the place must have been when the Van Hornes had lived

there as a family. Perhaps the son had learned to walk out there under the apple trees; and she recalled a picture of Mrs. Van Horne hanging in the living room, and thought how pretty she must have looked, with her bright golden hair and large brown eyes, against the delicate coloring of the lilac bushes.

So wrapt up was she in her dreams that she was rather startled when Louise and Burroughs came out. The three of them walked back together and evidently Louise and Jimmie Burroughs had been talking about Mr. Van Horne, for they took up their conversation, after they had called Winona, just where they had stopped it.

It was the son they were talking about, and it was evident that he had a very strong personality, for although Jimmie hadn't seen him for ten years he distinctly remembered every thing he had said and done the last summer he had spent in Thorndale.

"But from all you told me he must be a nice boy!" Louise said in surprise, after he had finished the long accounting.

"He's a darn nice boy!" Jimmie said emphatically. "Where did you ever get the idea that he wasn't? If his father wasn't such an old fool, and for his pride's sake won't tell the son that he's up against it, people wouldn't

criticize John the way they do. I say it's the old man who isn't the nice one in the family!"

"But at least the son ought to come and see his father!" Louise said indignantly. "That would be only natural."

"Had he?" Jimmie asked sarcastically. "Do you think the old man writes from here? He does not! He sends his letters down to Philadelphia and New York to be posted by friends. I know. How is the son to know how the old man is fixed, when he thinks he's traveling back and forth between New York and Philadelphia? He's no mind reader!"

The girls were glad to part with him when they got to his little shop in the village. He was too emphatic in his judgment of the old man. Even Winnie agreed to that.

They discovered that they were earlier than they had realized for supper, so they sat down on the porch, Winnie in the swing and Louise in a very rocky rocker which threatened to tip over backwards with her and consequently added a thrill to the general pleasure of rocking.

"Whatever are you thinking about, Winnie?" demanded Louise after she had rocked silently for five minutes and had watched her friend's preoccupied face interestedly.

"Well, it's about that almost empty house," Winona said smoothing out the wrinkle

between her eyes and evidently glad to think her thoughts aloud. "I was just wondering if we couldn't get some of the old furniture back, borrow it I mean, (for we'd never have money enough to buy it,) and dress up the house for the son's visit. We could easily get everything back safely."

"But how about mussing up the people's houses that we borrowed the furniture from?" asked Louise practically. "If they bought the things they evidently wanted and needed them. We couldn't very well borrow a bed out from under a sleeping family, could we? Or a highboy or bureau either for that matter, for what would they do with the contents of the drawers? No I'm afraid this is one plan of yours that we won't be able to carry through. There always has to be a first time for everything!" she added by way of consolation.

But Winnie wasn't to be turned from her plan as easily as that. She shook her head determinately.

"It's got to be, that's all!" she said firmly and Louise sighed tragically and rocked very hard for a time. After a while she said in a mock humble voice:

"Very well, dear, if you say it can be done I guess it can be! And if you'd accept my

little help, I'd gladly offer it to you to do with what you like."

"Thank you very much," Winnie said smiling across at her friend. "I do accept and I still say that somehow, someway, I'll get that furniture!"

"I don't think Mr. Coué, himself, had anything on you when it comes to suggesting things to himself," Louïse said, half teasingly, half in admiration of her friend's determination. "I think you could give him some new ideas on the subject for I've never seen anyone who could pick things out of the blue of the sky as cleverly as you do, and with as little effort."

"I don't know anything about that!" Winona said somewhat impatiently. "I only know I can't bear not to be able to put over a plan. The higher the things in the way to its completion, the more I am determined that it can be done!"

"I know," Louïse said, affecting to sigh. "Well, I know! Nothing ever stands in your way. And now, even the thought of people putting themselves or their innocent children or guests to sleep on a cold draughty floor, stirs no feeling of compassion in your breast."

"Don't be silly, Louise," Winona said with dignity. "If you are going to take

that ragging attitude I won't bother you with my plans."

"I'm sorry!" cried Louise contritely, bringing her chair to a stop and running over to the swing to kiss Winnie. "I didn't mean a word of it. You have the kindest heart in the world and you'd probably bring home all the family and the guests too and give them your bed! Please tell me some more!"

Winona couldn't help laughing too, and Louise sank down next to her in the swing, prepared to listen attentively.

"Well, it is this way...." Winnie began, but she was interrupted by a shadow falling across their faces and they looked up to see the postmaster standing before them holding out two letters, one for each of them.

"I thought I'd drop by with these," he said in explanation. "I live right down the road a piece and these came in the last mail so I thought you might want them."

"Thank you," Winnie said sweetly and then seeing that he evidently wanted to stop for a chat, for he leaned heavily against the porch post and pushed his no-color felt hat back on his head while he took out a handkerchief and wiped his face, asked him if he would sit down.

"Thanks, I will," he said dropping heavily

to the top step of the porch. The girls knew that he was a confirmed gossip, so they settled down to listen to the latest story of the happenings of Thorndale. But Winnie managed to steal a glance at her letter and found it was from Helen. She looked at it longingly, but tucked it away to be read later.

The postmaster was a kind man. His gossip was never vicious, only entertaining, and the girls found themselves enjoying it. After his story, which was about one of the summer boarders, was told he put on his hat, which he had laid beside him on the porch, and made a movement as though he was about to leave them.

Winona put out a detaining hand and said:

"Could you tell us something about Mr. Van Horne? We are very much interested in him and we feel also rather sorry for him."

The man ran a pale pink tongue over his pale pink lips as though in anticipation of something nice to happen, and settled himself comfortably again on the top step.

"It's a long story," he began, "I'm not just sure where to begin."

He kept silent for a time as though he was rearranging his thoughts then he said:

"It must be eighteen or nineteen years ago that I saw him for the first time. I can re-

member it perfectly. We used to have a stage-coach in those days that brought the people over from the train at Longport. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and I was sitting just about where I am now. This hotel was the best of its kind in those days and the stage always drove right up to this door. If you were going to stay at the hotel you were all right, but if you weren't, you were out of luck for it meant you had to walk to wherever you were going and drag your bag along too. We used to kind of gather around to see the stage come in, in those days. I remember this particular day very well. The stage drew up with a flourish, Andy Jones who drove it always was a sort of a show off fellow, and there in the back sat Mr. and Mrs. Van Horne and their son. The kid was about eight years old, I should say, and one of the friendliest youngsters I ever saw. And Mrs. Van Horne! She was a beauty. After I saw her I kind of forgave Andy Jones for showing off. I thought I might have done it myself! Come to think of it, we Thorndale folks liked the Van Hornes the first time we laid eyes on them."

And so he went on with his story, while the girls listened attentively. He must have talked for twenty minutes without stopping,

when he suddenly hesitated, stopped short and started once more to get up.

"My wife'll give me particular fits!" he said half smiling, half in earnest, as he picked up his hat. "She'll know I've been gossiping and she can't abide it!"

"It wasn't gossiping!" the girls cried together. "It was thrillingly interesting. You could just make us see everything."

He flushed with pleasure and said rather bashfully that he didn't get such a good audience every day.

"There's one thing I'd like to ask you," Louise said. "Miss Latimer told us the other night that his people came from around here. His father married a city girl and that was how Mr. Van Horne was born in New York. Do you know where his people came from?"

"Why yes," he answered. "I remember him telling me they came from Hillcrest."

Winnie sat up very straight.

"Are you sure it was Hillcrest?" she asked, as though she could hardly believe her ears.

"Quite sure," the postmaster said and added, naturally enough: "Why do you ask?"

"It sounds so familiar!" she said thoughtfully knitting her brows and turning to Louise. Then she suddenly cried.

"I know! Its the furniture village! I knew I remembered that name."

The man stood looking at her in bewilderment. Louise turned to him and explained.

"We went up there last year with her brother and some friends to look for old furniture. We found the best of the things in the Manor House which is now turned into a store and a post-office."

The postmaster interrupted her.

"The Manor House," he said excitedly. "That was the Van Horne's place. I remember hearing him tell some city folks about it one day."

The girls looked at one another in astonishment. Suddenly it came to them both.

"I remember," Winona cried excitedly. "The proprietor told us that there had been a 'vandoo' when the last of the Van Hornes moved out and sold the Manor House and moved away. And it was down in the cellar that we found the old blistered board which Charles said was the missing part of the Vernis-Martin cabinet and the frame that Helen has now, hanging over her highboy with a mirror in it. And the box. We found the locked box there too!"

"What locked box?" the man asked, look-

ing from one girl to the other as though they had suddenly gone mad.

Louïse laughed at his perplexed expression and tried to explain.

"We haven't gone crazy," she assured him, "There is really a locked box, we found it down in the cellar of the Van Horne house along with the things Miss Merriam just named. But we've never had a chance to open it. In fact we only remembered about it after we got on the train and I began to read the names of the stations we had to pass through and discovered Hillcrest among them and the trip we made last year came back to me and I remembered the box."

"Do you think *our* Mr. Van Horne is of the Van Horne Manor House family?" Winnie asked, her eyes flashing with excitement and her cheeks pink.

"I reckon so," the postmaster said, now almost as excited as the girls. "When are you going to get a chance to open that box? Think of it," he said as though to himself, "having a locked box that you forgot to open."

"I know!" Winnie said half apologetically. "It does seem like a terribly stupid thing to do but we really were too busy."

But the postmaster only shook his head as though it wasn't a natural thing to be that busy.

"And if you'll pardon me a minute," Winona went on, "I'll read my letter and tell you when we expect to open the box for I wrote to my friend to ask her to send it up by my brother when he comes next week."

She tore open Helen's letter as she spoke.

"It's coming up with them this Saturday," she said still flushed from excitement. "Oh, do you think that there might be anything in it that would be of value to Mr. Van Horne?"

"Seems hardly possible," the postmaster said scratching his head as he spoke. "If there's anything of value around it isn't generally put down in a cellar, even in a locked box."

Winnie's face fell but soon brightened again. She turned to Louise and said.

"I'm going to tell Mr. Thornton all of my plans and see what he thinks of them," and she then proceeded to outline briefly all that she and Louise were wanting to do for Mr. Van Horne. "It's the empty house, that worries me," she ended up by saying.

As she talked the postmaster had listened attentively and when she finished he took out his handkerchief and ran it over his face.

"Golly!" was his only comment and then again, "Golly!"

They sat silently for a time, Winnie's

spirits a little fallen from the reception her story had received. She had expected the postmaster to show as keen interest as he had done in the locked box.

Suddenly he leaned forward and took her hands.

"Little girl," he said, "I think you're a wonder. And if I know the people in this town, you'll have every one of them behind you. You leave the carting of the furniture to me. I've got a horse in my barn that's simply eating her head off. She's as gentle as they make them and if you two girls want to drive her around while you ask the neighbors to lend you the furniture, I'll be glad to let you have her."

"Thank you!" cried the girls in unison, while Winnie added rather shyly, "Then you do think it is a good plan?"

"I think it's immense!" he said heartily. "It was so immense when you first told me about it that it seemed to take my breath away! But we'll do it, don't you worry!"

"Bless you for that!" Louise said half-laughing. "I'm sure we're going to be able to refurnish the whole house from top to toe!"

"Most of us only bought the stuff to help Mr. Van Horne," Mr. Thornton went on. "I know I did myself. We'll start with Miss Latimer and me. I've got a corner cupboard

and a couple of chairs. She's got a bed or two and a bureau."

He went in with the girls and they found Miss Latimer in her own little room just off the kitchen. It was a small sitting room but it was bright with flowers and books and there was a canary in a golden cage.

It didn't take them long to tell Miss Latimer all about it.

"I'm sure we can borrow some of the things," she said and added, "What we can't borrow we'll fill in with some of my stuff. By the way," and she looked doubtfully at the girls, "one of the beds that belongs to Mr. Van Horne is in the room your brother and his friend were to have this week-end."

The girls looked at one another and laughed.

"I think we're both having the same thought," Louise said, gayly, "and that is that we'll let the boys have our room and not tell them anything about it and Winnie and I'll camp on the floor on mattresses. It won't be the first time, and we'll enjoy ourselves, never fear!"

"Well it's up to you," Miss Latimer said sensibly. "Come now and we'll go look at some others things that are in the attic. No time like the present!"

She led the way, a small glass lamp in her hand, to the long low garret which was the entire top floor of the old house. Neatly piled in one corner they found the furniture belonging to Mr. Van Horne.

"You can take it away tomorrow," Miss Latimer said, "That is if you want to."

They thanked her and trooped back to the sitting room and after awhile the postmaster left them, promising to bring the horse and carriage around early the next morning.

That evening they spent in making out a list of the people Miss Latimer knew had bought furniture.

"We'd better write down how to get there too," Louise declared practically.

It was a sleepy but very happy Winona who kissed her friend goodnight.

"Aren't there lots of nice people in the world?" she asked, blinking at the black square of the open window through which she could see a patch of star-filled purple sky.

"There certainly are!" agreed Louise, blowing out the lamp and getting into the creaking wooden bed. "Lots of them!"

CHAPTER TEN

THE Saturday which was to bring Billy and Tom and young Dr. Van Horne, was a grey cloudy day.

Louise, with her nose pressed against the window, trying to see farther than the chicken coop in the back yard, finally turned to Winona.

"If it would only make up its mind what it is going to do!" she sighed. "This way is much worse than if it really poured and lots more depressing."

"It certainly is," Winnie said tragically, running over to look out at the heavy mist too. "And it will take the boys ever so much longer to get here if it rains."

"Yes, and Mr. Van Horne may return before we are ready for him," Louise added.

Mr. Van Horne had been taken on a camping trip by a friend of the postmaster's, who had been allowed in on the secret, but they were expecting his return that afternoon in time for tea, which the girls were planning to serve at the Van Horne house.

They had worked hard, the girls and Miss Latimer and the postmaster, and the little

pumpkin house was furnished as nearly like it had been when Mr. Van Horne's son had left it. Now, everything seemed in readiness for a happy ending of their plan, except the weather.

"I'm sure something will happen to spoil things," cried Winnie, who generally wasn't a pessimistic person. "Just look at those fat ugly clouds of mist," and she pointed at some particularly heavy ones which seemed to roll up like the waves of the ocean and break themselves on the glass before the girls' faces.

"Come away from the window," Miss Latimer called cheerfully. "Watched clouds never boil. That's wrong, but you know what I mean," she said putting a large plate of flapjacks on the table before the girls and then going over to lay an affectionate arm on Louise's shoulder. She had a way of mixing her proverbs, which generally amused the girls. "I've seen lots worse clouds than those roll away about ten o'clock and leave behind them as pretty a day as you want to see."

"Oh *do* you think they will?" Winnie asked hopefully, her naturally good spirits coming to the top again with a bound.

"I'm not promising," Miss Latimer said shaking her head, and going out to the kitchen to bring in maple syrup and two steaming cups

of coffee. The girls were having breakfast with her in her own little room because it seemed a sort of a holiday.

They sat down, and the coffee and flapjacks seemed to cheer them, for it was in her own gay manner that Winnie dropped a light kiss on Miss Latimer's cheek before she ran out to join Louise who was waiting for her in the postmaster's little carriage.

The little horse's sleek back was wet and shiny from the heavy mist and it was difficult to see before them as they drove slowly along.

"Everything looks so nice," Winnie said contentedly, leaning comfortably back and letting the reins hang loosely, knowing that the little horse knew the way better than she did.

"It does," Louise agreed, "except that one bare place in the son's room where the highboy should be. Even now, when I think of that dreadful Mrs. Van Duesen, I want to kill her."

"But she was the only one who was horrid," Winnie said reflectively.

"Well, she was enough for me!" Louise said. "I'll never forget her!"

The girls had taken turns asking the people for their furniture and it had been Louise's turn to interview Mrs. Van Duesen. To be-

gin with, on the day they drove to her house, the little horse hadn't seemed to want to take them there at all. Generally a patient, polite little beast, he had absolutely balked when they had tried to turn him into Mrs. Van Duesen's roadway. So Louise had gotten out some distance from the house and left Winnie to amuse herself for, as she thought, fifteen or twenty minutes. Everybody else they had asked had kept them that long, talking and showing kind interest in their plan. But Louise was only gone five minutes at the most, and Winona hadn't settled herself comfortably to read her book, which she had brought along for the purpose, when she looked up and saw her friend flying down the front path and heard the resounding slam of the front door behind her.

"Drive on!" Louise had commanded as she climbed in and took the seat beside Winona, and knowing her friend very well, Winona had said nothing but had driven on as directed. They had gone almost a mile before she had heard Louise utter a long sigh and relax.

The little horse in the meanwhile had been ambling along as if he knew something was wrong, but with the breeze from Louise's sigh blowing his shaggy mane, he picked up his spirits and trotted at a great rate for him.

Once or twice he looked back over his shoulder as much as to say, "How's that? It ought to make you feel better!" And once he looked so far around that Louise broke into a nervous laugh.

"I know he's saying in horse language, that he told us not to go there!" she had said almost tearfully. "And oh, how I wish I'd listened to him. Winnie, it was perfectly dreadful. You have no idea how that woman's mind worked. When I asked her if I could talk to her for a few minutes she said I could, that she'd been waiting for us to come and talk to her because she wanted to tell us something. And then she went on to say that we were encouraging the old man to be a beggar and to deceive his son, and that she wasn't going to help us do it, not even if everybody else in Thorndale *had* been taken in by us. She said she'd paid good money for that highboy and she wasn't going to lend her furniture like a traveling library book. If she once started it there would be no end of people coming to borrow everything, from the bed out from under her, to the best silver teaspoons!"

"I think she is perfectly horrid!" Winnie had cried indignantly, and then added sympathetically, "But don't you care, Louise. We'll get something else to fill that place and they

may never notice. And I'll go to see the rest of the people today for your experience counts as a whole day's work."

But they had not been able to find anything to take the place of the highboy and although they hung a picture up in the bare wall space and pushed a chair and table closer together to try and fill in the lower part, it still didn't look right.

Suddenly out of the veils of mist before them came a motor car, slowing nosing its way along. The little horse of its own accord drew the carriage over to the side of the road, for the two girls had been too engrossed in their thoughts to notice the machine. Then finding that the horse had stopped and was eating the foliage at the side of the road while it waited, Louise looked around to find out the reason for it doing so. She saw the motor car and after a hasty glance, turned back to Winnie and their talk. It startled them to hear someone calling them by name.

At first they didn't recognize the closely veiled figure in the rear seat of the car but when two little dumpling figures waved joyously to them, Winnie gave a cry of recognition.

"Matilda and John!" And the two little

children almost fell over the side trying to get to the pony-cart.

Mrs. Whitney smiled at the girls and told the chauffeur to stop, then opened the door so that the children could scramble out. She got out after them and came over to the girls.

"We were afraid you had forgotten us!" she said.

"It wasn't because we had forgotten you that we didn't call," Winona explained swiftly. "It was only because we've been so busy."

"So busy, up here?" Mrs. Whitney said smiling rather doubtfully. "I thought you were on your vacation. Are you doing some special kind of work while you are here?"

And the girls, seeing she was really interested, proceeded to tell her about Mr. Van Horne and the little pumpkin house and the son whom they expected up that afternoon. She asked them a great many questions and they even told her about Mrs. Van Duesen and the highboy, and she sympathized with them.

As she got back into her car, after awhile, she called to them across the intervening road.

"I wish you'd bring your brother and his friend and the Van Hornes to tea tomorrow."

And the girls thanked her gratefully and promised.

"Isn't she nice?" Winona said looking

after the big car and throwing kisses to fat Matilda who leaned as far out as possible until she was out of sight.

"She is," Louise said and added with a mock shudder, "But oh, Winnie, when I heard you making plans for tomorrow so gayly, I couldn't help wondering if there will be a tomorrow. At least one that we will want to live through and have to look back on with pleasure! Oh, suppose that Dr. Van Horne is a horrid person and is mean to his poor old father and hates us all bitterly for bringing him up here to this perhaps unhappy reunion!"

"Don't you worry!" Winona said stoutly, tossing her head. "He won't be that kind of a person or Tom wouldn't have liked him. You know how particular Tom is!"

"Oh, I know you have reasons to toss your head proudly!" Louise said half laughing. "Any one who has staged as many successful plans as you have, can well afford to be haughty. But do you mind if I have a few private qualms? Remember this is the first or second plan only, that I've been bridesmaid to, and I'm not quite sure what to do with the bride's bouquet, I mean Mr. Van Horne's gratitude, when I receive it tomorrow."

"Don't worry about that!" Winnie said light-heartedly. "Only wait until you get it

and the proper thing to do will come springing forth from your sub-conscious mind.

Arm in arm, the girls walked through the Van Horne house for the last time before they would return to it that afternoon as its temporary hostesses. Everything was in order and after giving a final rub to the already highly polished piano, they went out and carefully locked the door behind them.

As Winnie turned to go down the steps, there was a rift in the grey clouds above them and a bit of blue sky peeped through.

"Surely that's a good omen!" she said happily and ran down to the waiting carriage.

"Even Miss Latimer and the postmaster found that they weren't very hungry when lunch time came along, and the girls could absolutely eat nothing in their excitement.

"It won't hurt us to go without one meal," Miss Latimer said wisely. "And anyhow we can make it up at tea-time."

She was going to the Van Horne house with them to help with the tea, and so was the postmaster.

After they had dressed themselves prettily, (Louise said she always had three times as much courage when she was dressed for the part,) they all drove down the twisting sweet-smelling road in air, which felt freshly washed

from the heavy morning mists, to the changed little pumpkin house.

There hadn't been enough time to give it a new coat of paint, but the porch pillar had been repaired and the panes of glass had been put in by the handy Jim Burroughs. The girls had weeded the garden and the postmaster had cut the grass and trimmed and trained the rose-bush over its trellis. Fresh white curtains, made of cheese-cloth and embroidered with large worsted flowers, which made them look gay and summery, hung at the windows, which glistened in the afternoon sunlight. A brass knocker on the front door, which had been so black that the girls had not known it was brass until Miss Latimer told them, had been highly polished by Louise until it vied with the windows in catching the most sunbeams. It was indeed a changed and gay looking little house.

"If they don't come soon I declare I'll jump out of my frying-pan," Miss Latimer said later, as she rocked agitatedly back and forth before one of the windows through which she had an uninterrupted view of the road.

"Don't do that," Louise said dryly and as she said it the postmaster leaned forward with a listening look and said:

"Here comes a car, she's just made the last hill!"

They listened attentively and by and by the sound of a horn warned them that an automobile was taking the last sharp curve. In a minute it would be in sight.

"You look, Winnie," begged Louise. "If it isn't them I don't feel I could bear the disappointment."

So Winnie ran and stood next to Miss Latimer and looked expectingly out.

"Is it they?" Louise said teetering up and down on her toes.

The car was now in sight and Winnie's face fell.

"No it isn't," she said disappointedly and turned away.

The car full of people was abreast of the little house now, and Miss Latimer said they were slowing down. But they only slowed down to get a better view of the dressed-up house and soon were going as fast as ever with a farewell toot of the horn.

"I can't stand this!" Louise said after awhile. She had been sitting looking at the hands of the clock and anyone who has tried doing this knows how slowly they seem to move when you are waiting for something nice to happen. She jumped up and went out the

back door to a clump of pine trees, well out of sight of the road, and sat under them, her fingers in her ears and her eyes on a book which she strove bravely to keep her attention on.

It wasn't until a shadow fell across her book and she looked up to see Tom standing before her, that she knew they had come. She jumped up and gave Tom both her hands, the book falling neglected at her feet.

"Oh, Tom, I am so glad to see you!" she cried, "Please tell me the best or the worst, whichever it may be, *is* he nice?"

"I don't think it's a nice way to greet a man, even if you have known him for years and years and he's your chum's brother," Tom said teasingly. "Asking him about another man in the same breath as you say, 'Hello!'"

"Oh, Tom, don't be silly," she begged. "If you knew how we've been waiting for you all and wondering how he was going to take this reunion business, you'd be pleased and flattered to death that I thought to say hello first! Oh, will he kill us and think we're bold for taking it upon ourselves to mind other people's business?"

"I don't know," Tom said and added by way of consolation: "It's only for a few days anyway. Surely Thorndale is large enough for you and Winnie to keep down the other end

of town if he should be angry. Between us, Billy and I could probably manage to amuse him."

Louise couldn't help laughing at the mental picture she had of herself and Winnie and Miss Latimer and the postmaster all hiding in the shadow of the post-office for two or three days and Tom took her hand and led her into the house.

A tall dark slim young fellow came forward to meet her. As soon as their hands met and she felt the strong friendly grip of his fingers, she knew she was going to like him, and she stole a look across the tea-table to where Winnie was standing talking earnestly to Billy.

"The old place hasn't changed a bit," he said, looking around. "I see Dad has new curtains though. We used to have blue and white ones in here as I remember."

He walked over to the piano and struck a few cords with one hand as he stood there.

"How nice looking he is!" she thought to herself as she watched him. There was a certain resemblance to his father in the color of his eyes and the way his hair waved back from his forehead, but otherwise his features were sharper and firmer. His chin was particularly good.

"So far, so good," Louise whispered to Miss Latimer who was fussing over the tea-table.

"I should say so," Miss Latimer replied. "But why doesn't old Mr. Van Horne come? Walter Harrison promised to have him here promptly at five."

"I wonder how we could tactfully leave them alone for their first few minutes with each other?" Louise said thoughtfully. "I think I'll ask Winnie, she'll know."

She went over to Winona who was still standing with Billy in one of the window recesses.

"I wondered when you were going to give me a chance to tell you how glad I am to see you," Billy said, taking her hand. "I watched your deep admiration for John Van Horne quite jealously."

Louise laughed, "You're not half as clever at teasing as Tom is. Better learn his ways before you can expect to affect me. I must speak to Winnie for a minute," she added and took her friend's arm. "What shall we do so that they can be alone?" she hissed.

"Alone? Who wants to be alone?" Winnie said quite stupidly for her.

"The Van Hornes of course," Louise answered. "Imagine how they will feel with

all of us watching every little movement they make when they meet for the first time in five years."

"I hadn't thought of that," Winnie said frowning.

She stood thinking deeply for a minute or two, then she left them and went over to Mr. Thornton. For a few minutes they talked earnestly in low tones then Louise saw him go out to the front porch. Winnie came back smiling.

"I've fixed that!" she said gayly. "Mr. Thornton is going to keep watch and when he sees Mr. Van Horne he is going to tell him he mustn't be surprised about anything that happens and he mustn't tell the son anything about the house being fixed up until he has had a talk with one of us. He won't be as surprised as you may think about the house, it will be such a secondary thing compared with his son. After he tells him all this, Mr. Thornton is going to wave his hand to Miss Latimer who is stationed in the window again, and we'll all go out into the kitchen and leave them alone for a time."

She had hardly finished when Miss Latimer came running over to them excitedly and said Mr. Van Horne was coming in, so the girls collected Tom on the way out and left a some-

what dazed father and son to meet. Winnie couldn't refrain from taking one peep through the crack of the opened door before they closed it, and she saw John Van Horne take a swift step or two across the intervening space and old Mr. Van Horne's arms fold around him, quite as though he was a little boy. She shut the door softly and turned to the others with tears of happiness in her eyes.

It was an hour later that Louise beckoned to Winnie and when she followed her out into the kitchen, led the way up the tiny back stair to the son's room. She stood back so that Winnie had an uninterrupted view of the room. Winona gave a little cry, for there, in its proper corner, stood the old highboy which Mrs. Van Duesen had refused to let them have.

"You darling!" cried Winnie kissing Louise, "How did you ever persuade Mrs. Van Duesen to give it to you?"

"I didn't get it here," Louise said truthfully. "I am pretty sure you didn't either because we've hardly been separated a minute the entire day. It must have been the postmaster."

"He didn't have the time either," Winnie said thoughtfully. "But I think we'll find out soon."

"I have my suspicions too," Louise said as they turned to go down stairs again.

Everybody but the postmaster went to Miss Latimer's for a late supper and then Billy drove the somewhat bewildered but happy old man and his son back to the pumpkin house. Winona went with him to show him the way back to the hotel.

After they left the Van Hornes and had turned the car toward home, Billy, who was driving slowly turned to Winnie and said:

"Tom and I have been puzzling our brains wondering what you and Louise were up to now. Why this deep interest in the Van Hornes and, if you waited this long to open it, why the sudden demand for the box, which by the way, took up a great deal of room in the car which would have otherwise been occupied by our guest's feet."

Winona explained everything to him and the hope the girls had of finding something in the box that would be of interest to the doctor and his father.

After she was through Billy looked down at her and smiled.

"Such a little planner!" he said gently. "And suppose there isn't anything in the box? What then?"

"Oh, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it!" she answered practically.

They found Tom and Louise waiting for them impatiently.

"We thought you were never coming back!" declared Louise. And pointing to the box which stood in the middle of the table, where the white china shaded lamp had been pushed aside to make room for it, she added:

"Please hurry and open that! It was all Tom could do to hold me back from striking it over its head with the poker. But he said it was really your box and it wasn't fair to open it before you came."

"He was right," Winona said firmly, walking over and laying her hand on the lid. "What a funny old box it is, and to think of us having forgotten all about it!"

The box was about the size and shape of a small doll's trunk. On the lid were three initials made by driving brass headed nails into the hard wood.

"R. F. D." Winnie said, squinting up her eyes in a way she had of doing when she was puzzled about anything. "R. F. D." she repeated, then turned to the others. "Those aren't Van Horne initials." she said.

"You remind me of the girl who sent a letter back with 'Wrong address' scrawled

across the envelope because she didn't recognize the handwriting and decided that it couldn't be for her." Louise cried, "How under the sun are you going to find out who Rural Free Delivery is if you don't open his box!"

"I hope we don't find any skeletons of dead animals," Tom said, having once had that experience when he was young having gleefully dug up and forced open a cigar box he had found deeply buried in a play-fellow's yard. He gingerly took the screw-driver Miss Latimer had provided before she went up to bed, saying she knew they wanted to be alone and tried half-heartedly to pry up the lid.

"Here let me do that!" Billy said going over and taking the screw-driver out of Tom's hand.

"Stand back every one!" cried Tom in mock tragic tones and putting his hands over his ears as though he expected a bomb to go off in their midst.

Louise tucked her feet up under her at Tom's allusions to the dead animals, but watched every movement of the screw-driver. It was an intense moment. Winnie was rocking hard and trying at the same time to give the appearance of absolute calmness. Tom stopped his ragging and looked interested too.

Billy struggled with the lock and suddenly with a shriek of protest, it gave way. Louise, her nerves strung up almost to a breaking point from the events of the day and the excitement of waiting for the opening of the old box, suddenly gave a low cry.

"I saw a face at the window!" she whispered, "There it is again!" and she pointed at the window behind Winona. Billy turned sharply, the screw-driver still in his hand. Tom sprang forward and jerked up the shade, which had been drawn to about four inches from the window-sill, all the way up to the top.

The world outside was bathed in the light of the full moon which was just about at its height. But as far as a human being was concerned, there was none in sight.

"You must have been mistaken, Louise," Winnie said almost sharply, "You're all strung up, like the rest of us, about the box. For goodness sake let's go on and open it."

But Louise turned to her and said stoutly:

"I wasn't mistaken. I saw two eyes looking in at us. I think they were a man's eyes, for when I pointed at them, it was a man's shadow which straightened up and hurried away. I could see the eyes as plainly as I see yours, Winnie."

Winona shuddered. Billy and Tom, by this time, had hastened to the front door and the girls could hear them outside on the porch. They were walking around to the window where Louise had seen the peering eyes.

"If they look in at me I'll die!" Winnie said nervously.

"I'd rather be out there with boys than shut in here doing nothing!" declared Louise "Come on let's go out too."

Just as they were about to open the front door they heard a shuffle, a slight noise, then a larger one as if someone falling. They looked at one another and both were white.

Louise threw open the door and ran out closely followed by Winnie. Before them the porch stretched smooth and empty in the bright moonlight which lighted up every corner and left no terrifying darkness where anyone could be hiding. But there were no boys in sight and the girls turned to one another in surprise.

"Where can they be?" breathed Louise taking Winnie's cold hand in hers and leading her back into the house and closing the door. She leaned against it heavily while she slipped the brass chain, which was on it, into place. Winnie sprang forward.

"Don't do that!" she cried. "Don't lock

the boys out with those dreadful eyes. Open it again!"

"Suppose we call Miss Latimer," Louise suggested, reluctantly unchaining the door again. "Perhaps she'd know something about it all. Oh, Winnie," she cried plaintively, "I'm so frightened."

Winona looked at Louise. She had never known her, in all the years of their friendship to be frightened before. Louise, who was generally so much braver than Winnie, was acting like a frightened child who wanted to hide its head.

As they turned to go upstairs to Miss Latimer, they heard a low knocking at the door. It seemed to be made by a hand in a heavy glove.

Winnie stood still, one hand on her beating heart. For a minute or two she could not make her feet go down the two steps she had ascended and cross the hall to that door which she had told Louise to unchain. Louise, at the sound of the knock, had sunk down on the bottom step and was hiding her face in her shaking hands.

"I've got to go," she said to herself. "I've got to go!" she repeated.

She wished she had not asked Louise to take the chain off again, at least there would

have been that between her and the person who stood outside knocking. As she thought this again the knock came, three distinct times.

"Louise," Winnie said, pulling herself together and trying to speak in a firm voice. "We can't act like a couple of babies. I'm going to open that door and I want you to come with me."

Louise stood up, somewhat shamefacedly.

"All right," she said, and followed Winona across the hall.

"Who is there?" Winona cried through the door.

"John Van Horne," a man's voice answered, and with a deep sigh of relief Winona threw open the door.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"COME in," Winona begged. "Oh, we are so glad to see you!"

"What is the matter?" he asked looking at the girl's white faces and then turning to close the door behind him. "What has happened to frighten you?"

As he stepped over the threshold Winnie looked at his hands. The most terrifying thing to her about the knock had been the softness of its sound. It had seemed as though someone was knocking who was wearing a velvet glove. Dr. Van Horne's hands were bare.

"Where are the boys?" he asked looking around the parlor where they had led him.

Louise explained everything to him. He looked rather worried and paced nervously back and forth as she talked. After she had finished:

"I'm going to see if I can find them," he said, and departed without another word.

Left to themselves again the girls looked at one another Louise went over and pulled down the shade which Tom had left up.

"What soft hands he must have," she said half as though she was thinking aloud.

"What do you mean?" Winnie asked. She wanted to find out if her friend had had the same impression of the knock being made by a hand in a heavy glove.

"Why, when he knocked," Louise said, "It sounded to me that it couldn't possibly be a man at the door. It sounded so faint and soft and oh, I don't know—terrible!"

"I noticed his hands especially," Winnie said, "And he wore no gloves."

"How I wish it was all over!" Louise said with a deep sigh.

They heard the front door open and the voices of the boys.

The girls ran out and met them in the hall.

"What has happened?" cried Louise almost tearfully, for Tom's coat was covered with rapidly drying mud and Billy was holding one of his hands in the other, which was done up in a blood soaked handkerchief.

"Where is Dr. Van Horne?" Winnie said sharply, for the boys were alone.

"Dr. Van Horne!" cried Billy. "Whatever would he be doing here with us at this time of night?"

"He was here just a minute ago," Winnie said turning to Louise for corroboration.

"He went out to look for you," Louise added.

"Well, we didn't see him," Tom said, trying to brush his clothes somewhat shamefacedly, it seemed to the girls.

"Won't *somebody* tell us what happened?" Louise begged. "We have been nearly frightened to death."

"Do you know what your 'eyes' were?" Billy laughingly said.

"Of course not!" Louise said sharply. "I didn't follow them. But if I had I wouldn't keep you waiting all night to hear about them when I got back!" she added indignantly.

"They were the cat Jerry's eyes," Billy said, with a smile. "When Tom and I went out and found the porch empty, we walked around the house and still found nothing and then suddenly we saw a dark shape come out from under the porch where it had been hiding, scoot down the cellar stairs and we knew it was Jerry. So we thought you girls would feel better if we brought him in and showed you that it really had been he, so we chased him into a corner, at least we thought we had, and then he jumped right over Tom's head and Tom tried to tackle him, like he used to do in football days, and of course he missed Jerry, and Tom fell down in a puddle which was left over from the bad weather we've been having."

"And then Billy made a grab at Jerry and

missed him but Jerry got him," Tom went on with the story, pointing to Billy's bound up hand in the bloody handkerchief. "So we thought we'd better call it a day and just tell you the story, and we were on our way back when Jerry came out of another hiding place and he did look so tempting to catch, as he walked just a few paces ahead of us on the brightly moonlighted road, that we followed him down to the corn-field where he disappeared for good."

"And what do you mean about John Van Horne being here and going out to look for us?" Billy asked Louise.

"He'll probably be back in a minute," she said turning away and walking over to the window. "It still seems to me that they were men's eyes," she added reflectively.

"They couldn't have been," Tom said going over to her. "And the reason it looked like a man running away was because the moon made Jerry's shadow four times as large as it it is ordinarily.

As he spoke, without knocking at all this time, John Van Horne opened the door. He came forward eagerly at the sight of the boys and said:

"I'm glad you are here! The girls seemed frightened badly about something and I

thought it better to leave them and go in search of you."

Tom proceeded to tell him the story of the cat's eyes which Louise had seen at the window. He laughed as Billy had done and then walking into the middle of the sitting room his eyes fell on the box which stood where they had left it, the light from the white shaded lamp falling on the brass initials.

"Where did that jolly looking box come from?" he asked, turning to Louise who stood near him.

Winnie came forward and answered for Louise. She told him the whole tale of how they had found the box last summer and how they hoped that it belonged to his family.

"R. F. D." he said knitting his heavy black brows thoughtfully. "Seems to me I heard father speak of a Rudolph Francis Duane. He was a great uncle on my father's mother's side, and from all accounts wasn't a very pleasant gentleman."

"Do you think it can be his box?" Winnie asked excitedly. "We would have asked you to stay with us to open it," she added hastily, thinking perhaps that he thought it odd of them to be so calmly taking it upon themselves to keep something which in reality belonged to his family, "but we thought you would like

to be with your father the first evening, and besides we didn't want you to be disappointed if there isn't anything."

"That's all right," he said, still slightly frowning. "There is something I want to ask you all, though. It is my reason for coming back at such a late hour."

They waited in silence for him to go on. All of them were sure however that they knew what was coming.

"Father acts upset about something," he said after a minute or two. "He walks around the house touching this and that piece of furniture almost as though he hadn't seen it for a long time and he was mighty glad to get it back. And he said a very odd thing when he saw the old highboy in my room. He said, "I'm glad that they didn't scratch it, it hardly looks as though it had been moved at all does it?" Can you tell me what he meant, for he caught himself up after he said it and looked quite guilty. I'd really like to know."

Everyone looked at Winnie. She was standing where the lamp light fell full upon her face and at their steady glances she flushed. She was worried about her plan, at last. Suppose this tall Van Horne man who insisted upon knitting his heavy black brows in such a terrifying way should not understand that they

had only meant to do right. He might be very angry at her, for after all it *was* her plan and Louise had tried to get her not to go on with it!

Seeing that everyone else was looking at Winnie for an answer, John Van Horne looked too. So she took a deep breath and began her story.

It must have taken fully fifteen minutes to tell it all, and it was fully five more minutes before he said anything to give them an idea of how he was taking it. It was one of the most unpleasant silences Winnie had ever been through. Louise came over and stood next to her, as though to give her courage by her presence. Even Tom and Billy moved a trifle closer.

"It's all so sudden!" he said finally. "I hadn't any idea how father was situated. He always wrote me the jolliest kind of letters and they were always posted from New York or Philadelphia. I didn't know that he was up here. I sent his letters in the care of his club in New York and they must have forwarded them to him. It all seems so unreal somehow and unbelievable." He sank down on a rocking chair and sat for a minute or two looking straight ahead of him. There was something so dejected in his pose that it touched some-

thing in Louise's heart and made her suddenly very sorry for him. She went over to him impulsively and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Don't feel so badly," she said. "We're all here ready to help you do anything you think best. It really was the only way for you to find out the true circumstances."

She went on to tell him of how the Woman's Aid had wanted to write and how his father had not allowed them to do so.

He put his hand over hers and gave it a thankful little squeeze, then he stood up.

"Will you all help me some more?" he asked at the row of sympathetic faces before him.

"Of course!" Winnie cried. "If you'll only tell us how."

"I'm wondering how the best way to take it is," he said as they seated themselves around the table and looked inquiringly at him for orders.

And so for half an hour they talked of ways and means and it was finally decided to not say anything about it to old Mr. Van Horne unless he asked them, and that the son would try to buy back the furniture.

Winnie hadn't talked very much for the last few minutes. She had been sitting back

a little out of the lamp light and now she leaned forward and said:

"Perhaps you'd rather I didn't plan any more for you, but there is one thing I would like to suggest. I think that it will be rather hard for your father to stay in Thorndale after you go back West. I think he'd probably like to go down to New York or to Philadelphia, and if he would go, it will be rather a waste of money to buy back all the furniture. Of course there are some pieces you'll want to keep for association's sake, but the majority would be just as well returned to the people we borrowed them from. Then with the money you would have spent on that, Mr. Van Horne could live quite a little while in New York or Philadelphia."

She sank rather shyly after this long speech. But Billy said, looking at her as he said it.

"I think Winnie's right, as usual."

"I wonder if father would find it very lonely out West?" John said looking at them in turn. "That would be a change for him and I'd like so much to have him."

Louise sank back with a sigh.

"That is exactly what I thought would be the nicest thing of all for your father," she said decidedly. "I think he would be happier there than anywhere else in the world."

Everybody agreed to this and all their spirits went up after that. It was Tom who suddenly pointed to the old box and said:

"We seemed doomed not to open it. Come ahead, let's try again!"

The five young people bent eagerly over the box. This time it was John who lifted the lid.

"Oh!" cried Winona. "Whatever is it?"

The box was filled with letters. Old faded yellow pack of neatly arranged, neatly tied up letters.

On the top of one of the piles was a slip of paper with "John Alexander Van Horne, his letters, 1769–1780" written on it. The handwriting was the stiff neat writing of long ago.

Louïse looked up and said excitedly:

"Then it really is your father's ancestors! R. F. D. or Rudolph Francis Duane must have collected the letters and put them all in his own box."

John's face was flushed and excited and his eyes brilliant as he turned back to the box. He took out pack after pack of letters, possibly six in all, and laid them on the table. On the very bottom of the box was a brown little book, dog-eared and worn as though it had been through hard days before it had been placed

in the box. John opened to the title page and the others gathered closer to look too. It read: "Diary of John Alexander Van Horne —1775–1780." He placed this on the table too, along with the letters then he turned to the boys and girls.

"Let's each take a package of letters and see what we can find," he said, handing a particularly fat package to Louise as he spoke. The others agreed and each took a package, leaving one lying with the little book.

Winona was the first to get the knot of the faded red tape which held her letters together, unfastened. She slipped one out of its envelope and hastily read it through and as she did so, her face fell.

"Did any of you ever hear of Robert Morris?" she asked. "This letter is from him and seems very stupid to me, all about some money dealings, as far as I can find out."

"Don't you know," Louise said hastily, "He had something to do with financing the Revolution. Didn't he Tom?"

"Can't prove it by me," answered Tom, as though he didn't want to be interrupted in the middle of the letter he was reading and suddenly he gave a whoop.

"Listen to this!" he cried. "I guess we

all know who this is! Anthony Wayne! Mad Anthony, no less! Oh, this is good!"

"Oh, let us see!" the girls cried in unison, but Tom laughingly held it above his head and said:

"Read your own and don't waste so much time. Hurry up and perhaps you'll find something better than mine even."

Billy hadn't joined in the general scramble for the letter, he was busily reading one from his own pack. When he finally finished he turned to John and said quietly.

"I've found one here that if it is authentic, will be very valuable," and he held out a small slip of paper to John, who took it and read it then looked at Billy, his eyes brighter than ever.

"Do give it to me!" cried Louise, and John handed it to her.

"Winnie!" cried Louise a minute later, "It's from Benedict Arnold!"

"Before he became a traitor," Billy added.

After that the letters became general. Everyone just took whatever they thought most interesting looking but it was Winona who suddenly sat back and gave a low little gasp, half of excitement, half of incredibility. Her hand was shaking from excitement as she held out a worn old envelope and its contents, a narrow particularly faded piece of paper.

John took it and read aloud the writing on the envelope:

"Kept in memory of our Great and Revered President of the United States of America, George Washington." And underneath was written, "And may God bless and keep him."

On the faded slip which had been within the envelope was one short sentence. It was evidently a direction from Washington to Colonel Van Horne as one of his aides. But the few short words of the message didn't count; it was the signature George Washington that held the eyes of the young people and made them look at one another almost in awe.

"Do you think they can all be real?" Winnie said, in a hushed voice, patting with a soft hand one of the letters which was still unopened.

"If they are, they are worth untold gold," Billy said decidedly. "How about the diary, John?"

John had been reading the diary, skipping to a page here and there but as Billy spoke he looked up.

"It seems that my great-great-grandfather went through the entire war," he said, shutting the book. "It is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me, finding all

these things after so many years! I wonder what father will say!"

"I can hardly wait to have you tell him!" Louise cried impulsively. "I wish he could have been here when we opened the box!"

"I wish Roger were here!" Winnie said with a sigh. "He's so clever, I'm sure he'd know whether these letters are authentic." Nobody answered her.

"Would you mind," he asked, "If I went home now and took these things with me? I guess father will be waiting for me. I'd like to show them to him tonight."

"Certainly not!" Winnie cried, and jumped up hurriedly and started to bundle the letters back into their neat piles and to place them in the box. Louise helped her and it was soon done.

After everything had been replaced John took the box and walked to the door with it held carefully under his arm.

Billy sprang up hastily and said he'd run him home in the car and when he was getting it, Louise stood in the doorway with John. They stood silently looking out at the moonlighted world and after a while Louise turned to him and said:

"Will you answer a question?"

"Anything at all!" he said, almost gayly for him.

"Will you tell me then why your knock was so soft tonight when you came to the door when Winnie and I were waiting for the boys? It sounded as though you were wearing velvet gloves."

"Did it?" he said, half smiling at her. "I'm glad that it did, for I was afraid if I knocked too loud I might disturb Miss Latimer. I wrapped my coat around my hand to soften the sound."

Louise laughed rather shamefacedly.

"I'll confess I thought for one dreadful moment it was a ghost," she said. "And I'm almost sure Winnie did too, but we were afraid to admit it to each other! I absolutely could not bring myself to open the door to a ghost. If I thought it would have been a flesh and blood robber I would have wept on his shoulder from pure joy."

Billy blew the horn just then to let them know he was waiting and John said goodnight.

She found Tom and Winnie in a deep discussion when she returned to the living room.

"You are the most tactless girl I ever saw!" Tom was saying in brotherly frankness, looking at Winona in scorn.

"What did I do?" Winnie cried in be-

wilderment, but Tom refused to answer her.

"Whatever is the matter now?" Louise asked, looking from one to the other.

"Oh! Winnie tactfully wished that Roger was here to tell us if the letters were valuable or not!" Tom said witheringly. "And Billy naturally didn't like it. He went out of the room looking as though he'd like to choke Winnie."

"Well if Billy is as silly as that," Winnie said scornfully, "to take offense about my wishing Roger were here, he can go off and have the pouts for all of me!"

"Don't you know by this time that no man likes to have a girl or anyone for that matter, wishing for another man because she thinks he is more clever than the first man?" Tom asked still witheringly, although a trifle mixed himself when it came to explaining it.

"I don't pretend to know anything about men," Winnie said with affected dignity. "I haven't the time to make a study of their whims as you seem to think I should do."

"All right Lady Vere de Vere!" Tom cried laughingly admitting that Winnie had won this particular passage at arms. "Have it your own way!"

The tension broken, they all laughed and immediately felt better for it.

Billy opened the door just then and stuck his head in.

"Winnie, will you come out here for a moment?" he asked somewhat shamefacedly, and Winona always quick to forgive and forget jumped up gladly and went to him.

He led the way to the porch where the moon, riding high in the heavens, painted the wooden floor with black and silver making it look like a huge checker-board. It was almost as light as day, but familiar objects wrapped in the silver light took on fairy forms which were never theirs in the day time. The world seemed a magic place. A little light wind blew refreshingly and Winona held her face up to it as though inviting its cooling kisses.

For a time they stood in silence letting the beauty of the night soothe the excitement of the long thrilling day, which had been filled to the brim with happenings.

Finally Billy said:

"I'm sorry I dashed out the way I did to take Van Horne home. When I got outside I realized what an utter fool I'd been so I came back to tell you as soon as I could."

Winona looked up at him gratefully.

"It was a hard day," she said with a little sigh. "And an exciting evening, I suppose we are all strung up more than we realize."

Then to change the subject she told him about Mrs. Van Duesen and the returned highboy.

"Mrs. Van Duesen probably had a change of heart," he said lightly, dismissing the subject.

"Perhaps," Winnie said thoughtfully, "but I don't think so."

"Well don't bother your little head about it tonight!" he answered in a big brother tone. "I think a little walk may do you good and make you sleep better."

Not waiting for her to reply, he slipped in and took a blue cloak from a peg behind the door and wrapped it around Winona's shoulders.

"You look like a little Blue Riding Hood," he said, tying the strings in front for her, quite as though she were a little girl and unable to take care of herself.

She smiled up at him happily.

"Sometimes it's nice to have someone take care of you as though you were a little girl again," she said pensively. "Sometimes lately I feel dreadfully old. When I look back upon the time we had the Camp Fire and the pageant and the year we ran the War Farm and the Community Service year, and I remember how much each and everyone of them meant to me, and how we girls used to sit by the

"I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL," BILLY SAID. "YOU ARE WAITING FOR YOUR DREAMS TO COME TRUE"

hour and plan and plan and try to think up things to do to make us better and better every day in every way," this she said half laughingly, "and how much life meant to me, and now, when I'm really seeing great big thick slices of life every day down in the Garnett Neighborhood House, and am really doing something worth while, why still, those other times seem the biggest of all, and I'm *sure* they were the happiest! Louise and I were saying the other night that we didn't feel settled in anything. It is just as though we were waiting for a curtain to go up and that we wanted to hurry and get everything we are doing now, finished and out of the way before the curtain *does* go up. I never used to be restless this way."

"I know how you feel," Billy said. "You are waiting for your dreams to come true. It is time they did; you and Louise have been spinning and making them for years and while you were dreaming them, why, then you were happy. But now your thread is all used up, for a time, you'll have to have a realized dream to get more thread from. I think I'm right."

"Perhaps you are," Winnie said thoughtfully. "I thought the Garnett Neighborhood House was my dream last year, and I thought

it was a big enough one to last me a whole lifetime, but somehow it has changed, I couldn't just tell you where or how, and I find I am wishing for something else. I wonder if I would have been happier if I had gone to England with Roger's mother when she wanted me?"

"Winnie," Billy said, standing still in the road and taking her by the arm and turning her slowly toward him. "There is something I want to ask you, promise me you'll give me a true answer."

"I'll tell you the truth Billy," Winona said looking at him steadily out of her large blue eyes. "Ask me anything you like."

"Winnie dear," Billy said and his voice sounded rather husky, "do you love Roger?"

Winnie's eyes fell before his searching blue ones. They stood silently in the moonlight for a few minutes. The white light made little silver hollows in her slim young neck, for the blue cape had fallen back and left it bare.

Finally she looked up at him.

"I don't honestly think I'm in love or know the meaning of love or ever think of it!" she said truthfully. "I'm perfectly contented with you and Tom and Louise and I like Roger's friendship too. But, for being in

love with him or anyone else for that matter, I don't think I am."

Billy looked deep into her eyes and seemed satisfied for he let go of her arm and said in a low voice;

"For the second time this evening, I'm sorry to have bothered you. I seem to be a selfish soul, only thinking of myself and the answers to my questions. Will you forgive me?"

"Of course," Winnie said, and added: "I think we'd better go back now. Louise and Tom will be missing us if we don't."

When they returned to the sitting room they found Louise and Tom waiting and still talking about the old box.

"I wish," Winona started to say, and then stopped, remembering the disastrous results of her last wish.

"What were you going to wish this time?" Tom asked in a sarcastic voice which brothers only seem able to use to sisters when they are bringing them up.

Winona flushed but added bravely, "I was going to say I wished Charles were here."

"Now you are wishing for someone sensible," Tom said more kindly.

"Thank you, most gracious Sir!" Winona said making a deep curtsey.

Tom stood up and bowed very low to her,

"I mean it," he said straightening up and running his hand through his straight, man-colored hair. "Charles would of course know all about it. Now, we'll have to cart all the things way back."

"Well, we can't do anything more to-night," Louise said. "Come on Winnie, let's go upstairs, my eyes feel like pin-points I'm so sleepy."

They went upstairs and stumbled into their room. Louise struck a match and disclosed the boys' belongings neatly laid out on the bureau top, and their bags standing, still open, on the table.

"Horrible!" cried Louise. "We said we'd sleep in the other room, do you remember? because the beds belonged to Mr. Van Horne. Oh, I'm so tired I'd give anything for a comfortable bed under me tonight."

Winona led the way across the hall. She pointed down dramatically to the mattresses neatly made up, on the floor.

"Well, it can't be helped, I suppose," Louise said, scrambling out of her dress as quickly as she could. "I'm too sleepy to even wash my face." She laid down on her mattress and gave a sigh of relief.

"It's not so bad," she said snuggling down

into her pillow. "I guess Miss Latimer gave us each about four feather ones."

"I'm so tired I could sleep on the floor," Winnie said, but although she had meant it when she said it, she found herself lying awake and going over and over in her mind the events of the day, and the thing which stood out the sharpest of all was what Billy had told her about waiting for her dreams to come true.

CHAPTER TWELVE

They drove over to Mrs. Whitney's the next afternoon as they had planned. Everyone liked everyone else, including Matilda and little John. Of course the subject of the box came up and Mrs. Whitney was told all about it. She was properly impressed, the girls thought and when she beckoned to them, a little while later, they followed her gladly into the house, feeling that she was going to ask more about it all.

"I'm tremendously interested in the whole thing!" she said as they sank down in comfortable wicker chairs in her own little private room, where she had led them. "I'm going to give you a note to take to my husband," she went on, flushing prettily as she said it but going bravely on. "I know that he will be able to tell you just how valuable those letters and the diary are, and I'm pretty sure if you took them to anyone else, that you didn't really know, they might charge you for telling you and then might tell you they are of no value."

"He lives in New York," she went on going over to her desk and taking a piece of notepaper from the top drawer. The girls thanked

her gratefully and for a time only the sound of her hurrying pen broke the silence of the room.

"There!" she said finally holding the sheet of paper out for the girls to read, and when they were finished, slipping it into an envelope.

"He has made a study of Colonial things for years, and I believe he has one of the most complete collections of its kind in New York."

Suddenly Louise said:

"Did you persuade Mrs. Van Duesen to give up her highboy?"

"We found it in John Van Horne's room yesterday afternoon," Winnie explained.

"Yes, I did," Mrs. Whitney said half shyly. "It didn't take much to induce her to let me borrow it after I told her a thing or two."

The girls thanked her and finally they went back and joined the men on the porch.

Winnie went up to the room she shared with Louise early that night. She wasn't particularly sleepy however, after she got there, so propped herself up on her mattress with her own and Louise's pillows which she borrowed, and prepared to read until Louise came upstairs.

Tom and Louise had disappeared right after the light Sunday night supper, saying they were going out on the river canoeing.

Billy and she had gone for a walk but they were both tired from the previous day's happenings and when Billy said he had to go back and get the car in readiness for the long trip it had to take the following day, she welcomed the chance to escape to her own room and be alone for a time.

It was very lonely in Thorndale in the winter, Miss Latimer had told the girls, and there was little to do. She had therefore, collected a number of books from here and there and everywhere, and although she kept them in her own room and for her own use, she allowed the girls to read them. Now, Winona was deep in Rhoda Broughton's "Good-bye Sweetheart." Of course she found it sentimental and untrue to present day life, for girls don't die of broken hearts nowadays, with so many things to take the place of their lost lovers and the common sense to see these things. Notwithstanding, she found herself "Weeping a little weep" over the sad ending, when Lenore, the beautiful, dies of consumption.

She put the book down and lay thinking for a time, and then was called back to reality by the sound of Louise's swiftly running feet in the corridor outside and the sudden opening and closing of the room door.

Louise, her eyes shining and her cheeks

becomingly flushed and looking particularly pretty, ran lightly over and threw herself on her knees by the side of Winnie's low mattress.

"Whatever is the matter?" Winnie cried in low-voiced surprise, for Louise was more excited than she had ever remembered seeing her.

"Shut your eyes and I'll tell you, for I can't bear to tell with you looking at me, I'm so horribly embarrassed!" Louise cried softly, and Winona obeyed.

She felt Louise's arms steal around her and hold her very tightly and then whispering very low and jumbling all her words in together Louise told Winnie her great news.

"Are you trying to tell me you and Tom are engaged!" cried Winona sitting up perfectly straight and opening her blue eyes very wide. "I can't believe it! Why it was only yesterday it seems that you were children quarrelling and teasing one another!"

"We were only quarrelling and teasing one another about half an hour ago," Louise laughed light-heartedly. "And I suppose we'll quarrel and tease each other all the rest of our natural lives! But oh, Winnie! do say you are glad. I ran all the way home to tell you and left Tom down at the river tying up the canoe!" Winona put her arms around Louise

now and kissed her heartily on each of her pretty cheeks and also on her mouth.

"Of course you know I'm delighted!" she cried. "But isn't it rather sudden? I knew you and Tom always liked each other but I never knew you were thinking of becoming engaged for many years to come! Goodness how old we all must be getting!"

"We are getting older," Louise said more soberly. "But no, I wouldn't say our engagement was a surprise. Ever since I've known Tom I've never thought about another boy and he said tonight he has felt the same way about me."

"Didn't you ever see anyone you thought you might like better?" Winona asked almost wistfully, thinking as she did so how Roger and Billy had so often teetered back and forth in her affections.

"I never did," Louise said spiritedly, "Never! Why I think I would have felt like a Mormoness if I had! Tom has always pleased me in everything. He knows how to fit into my moods, as I flatter myself I know how to fit into his. I think he is very handsome and I adore his family," and she gave Winona an affectionate squeeze. Life seemed very full and pleasant to Louise at that moment and she was lavish with her affections. She would

have liked to have stood on a high hill-top with her arms open to receive and hug the entire world, fish, fowl and human!

Winnie laughed.

"How sure you are!" she cried. "It must be lovely to feel the way you do at this present minute!"

"It is," said Louise the downright. "No use in pretending that it isn't. Wait until it happens to you and you'll see, and you won't lie and laugh at yourself as you are now doing at me, either!"

"I probably won't!" Winona said with an exaggerated sigh. "I'll probably be taken myself as seriously as you and the rest of the people who are in love always do. Oh, well, plenty of time for that!" she said. "Tell me some of your plans, or haven't you had time to make any yet."

"That reminds me!" Louise cried jumping up and running over to the door. "I left Tom down at the boat house tying up the canoe and ran ahead to tell you all about it. He's probably downstairs waiting to hear how you have taken it. I'd better go down and tell him." And she whisked out of the room as quickly as she had come in.

Left alone, Winnie punched her pillows

back into place and leaned back to think the whole thing over.

She couldn't help envying Tom and Louise a little. They were so sure of each other it seemed. Had been for so long in fact, that they had simply taken it for granted that everyone knew that they loved one another. She wondered if every girl always knew her true love when she saw him. She remembered Lenore had in "Good-bye Sweetheart." Louise too, had just told her that she had never thought of anyone beside Tom since she had met him years and years ago. She thought of Billy and Roger, both of whom she felt were a little more than just friends to her. Both of them were good and kind and infinitely patient. How sweet Billy had been only the night before. She remembered how he had wrapped the little blue cloak around her. She had felt quite happy being with him and she liked being taken care of. Then she recalled Roger, and the last time she had seen him, waving to her from the steamer.

On and on went her thoughts. Had she perhaps finished with all the material of which her girlish dreams had been made, as Billy had said she had done? He had said she would have to wait for one of her dreams to materialize before she could go on. And then suddenly

she realized that the Garnett Neighborhood House had been the biggest dream of all. She had meant it, the year before, when she had told Billy she couldn't go down south to stay with his mother and sister because she felt that she had her work and that she loved and needed it, and that she felt that it, perhaps just a little, needed her too. She had meant it absolutely and had felt very secure in that dream for quite a time. She *had* been happy, but after all had she really helped the children as much as she had hoped to do, had she been able to do the work any better than a thousand other girls who would have had her place? She felt very humble as she lay there on her low mattress, humble and rather worthless and looking back on the Winona she had been in the past, envied her very much. That Winona had always thought she was doing right. Always knew that her heart would guide her. This new Winona she had discovered herself to be was a stranger. A new girl entirely and one she wasn't quite sure how to get along with. She didn't quite know what to do when this new girl whispered to her that perhaps work wasn't all, after all, that perhaps love, such as Charles and Helen and Louise and Tom felt for one another, was worth while and not to be pushed aside until

one had nothing else to think of. Perhaps by that time it would be tired of waiting and would have gone.

She let her thoughts run on for awhile longer then she suddenly jumped up from the mattress and walked over to the window.

"This will never do," she cried sharply. And she was glad to hear the tones of the old Winona she knew so well, in her decided voice.

"I mustn't become sentimental," she cried almost impatiently. "It must be the effect of the book, and the news of Louise and Tom becoming engaged." She gave "Good-bye Sweetheart," a slight push as she spoke and it slipped down behind the wash-stand where she let it lie.

She felt high strung and nervous and in no condition to listen to Louise's gay talk when she would return, so she put out the lamp and left a shaded candle for Louise, thinking as she did so that it might be burned out before Louise came upstairs, if she and Tom were like the rest of the engaged people she had known in her life. And when Louise did come up about half an hour later, Winona really had fallen asleep.

The boys were up at four the next morning, stamping and fussing around, getting their things packed in the car. Although they tried

not to waken the girls, Louise heard them and called Winona, suggesting they go down and have breakfast with them.

At five, just as the sun came up to peep over the shoulder of a range of mountains in the east, the boys left. Louise and Winona dressed in thin summer frocks, shivered as they stood on the porch in the early morning light. They waved and waved until the boys were out of sight. It was almost with a sigh of relief that Winnie turned to go into the house again. Many of her thoughts of the night before of Billy and Roger had returned with morning and had made her self-conscious and not altogether happy in Billy's presence.

The rest of their stay in Thorndale was pleasant. John Van Horne had not returned with the boys to the city. He remained to settle things and planned to go down with the girls and his father the following Saturday. In the matter of the letters he had had many talks with Mrs. Whitney and he was thoroughly convinced that they were authentic.

When the day came for them to go home, Mrs. Whitney called for them in her large car. They were very grateful, but Winona looking closely at Miss Latimer's kindly face when she was kissing her good bye, noticed that she was looking disappointed. She took

her by both arms and turned her around to face the light from the window.

"What is the matter?" she asked in a low voice. "Please tell me, I know that you are disappointed about something. Is there anything we can do?"

But before Miss Latimer could answer, the Ford which had brought the girls over to Thorndale, drew up to the door with a loud toot of its well-trained horn. In the rear seat was Mr. Thornton. And then Winona knew! Their friends were planning to take them in the Ford, and Mrs. Whitney's offer to drive them over had completely broken up their plan. With the realization of this, she dropped Miss Latimer's arms and ran out to the car. She spoke hastily to Mrs. Whitney, who smiled and ordered the chauffeur to drive on, and with a smile and a wave of her hand, she called over her shoulder.

"I'll go ahead and pick up the Van Horne's, and see you later at the station."

Louise turned to Winona in surprise.

"What does she mean?" she asked.

Hurriedly Winnie told her, and Louise said under her breath.

"Isn't it good you found it out in time," and then she walked over to Mr. Thornton and climbed into the Ford next to him.

Miss Latimer ran out and took Winnie's hands.

"Isn't Mrs. Whitney driving you over?" she asked excitedly.

"No," Winnie said, patting the kindly hand resting on her arm. "No," and she added: "Hurry up and get your hat on for you are coming down to see us off."

Miss Latimer was as excited as a school girl as she flutteringly climbed into the car. Her bonnet was a little to one side but she was too happy to notice it. Mr. Hazen came out and stood on the porch bellowing good-bye to them as long as they were in sight, so loud was his voice. His handsome face and shy little boy smile were the last things they saw before they turned a bend in the road.

As they passed the branch of the road leading to the little pumpkin house, now nicely boarded up for the winter, Louise cried excitedly:

"Oh, there is Mrs. Van Duesen and she's waving to us to stop!"

The Ford slowed down and Mrs. Van Duesen came forward in rather bold yet shamefacedly way.

She held out her bony hand stiffly to Louise and said:

"Well, I guess I'd better tell you I'm glad

you got the highboy, and I've come to the conclusion that the old man wasn't so bad after all. I got to thinking I'd be missing seeing him around this fall and winter."

She said it all grudgingly but Louise wasn't a person to hold anything in for any one and she was quick to see that Mrs. Van Duesen was really trying to be nice, (for her!) So she leaned forward and took the outstretched hand and said:

"We're glad too about the highboy. It was nice of you to let us have it after all."

"And I didn't charge the son a mite more than I paid for it when he came to buy it back," Mrs. Van Duesen said as a parting.

"That was lovely of you!" Louise cried and they bid her good bye and went on their way again. Tears came to Winnie's eyes as she looked out the train window at the group standing on the platform.

"Every one was nice even Mrs. Van Duesen," she said.

The girls decided to stay at the Little Crooked House for two days before going up to their families, and so be able to go with John Van Horne when he took the letters and the diary to Mr. Whitney.

John called for them about ten o'clock on the morning they were to see Mr. Whitney.

He carried the letters and diary, done up neatly in brown paper, under his arm, and the girls had never known him to be in such high spirits. They took the subway down-town and walked across Central Park to one of the cross streets in the sixties. The Whitney house was a tall somewhat narrow four story brown-stone one. Back in the nineties rows and rows of them had been built exactly alike, and they had certainly been built for convenience and the thought of the families comfort, for they were particularly well-arranged.

The two girls and the young man climbed the steep flight of brown stone steps to the front door and stood in an anxiously waiting group for their ring to be answered. They stood there fully five minutes before Louise, who was nearest to the electric button, pushed the bell again. They waited again for several minutes and then they heard foot-steps behind the closed door and a man opened it.

He was tall and slender and dark and his black hair was turning white at the temples. He peered at them through thick lense glasses, and waited for them to explain their reason for ringing his bell.

It was Winona who spoke first. She put out her hand in her friendly way and said:

"Isn't this Mr. Whitney?" and when he

nodded his head and took her hand, she continued. "I'm Winona Merriam and these are my friends, Louise Lane and John Van Horne. We have come to ask you a very great favor." She handed him the letter from his wife, after he had bowed to Louise and John and he led the way into the house before he opened the letter.

He looked up from it, his thin face flushed and his brown eyes keenly lighted behind his thick glasses.

"Have you the letters and diary with you?" he asked, and then noticing the brown paper parcel under John's arm, he added: "Ah, yes, I see you have."

The room he had led them to first was a large, rather long one, with old-fashioned glass chandeliers and long windows almost to the ground and two or three mirrors in heavy gold-leaf frames. The furniture was swathed in summer covers and the real beauty of the chandeliers and the mirrors was partly dimmed by coverings of mosquito netting.

"Come out of here!" he said hastily glancing around at the inhospitable look of the covered furniture. "Come into my room."

They followed him up a steep flight of stairs to the second floor and after he had flung open

the door he stood aside to allow the girls to enter first.

Glass-front cases, as high as the ceiling, lined the four walls. A large flap-topped desk littered with papers stood in the centre of the room and on the floor next to it were three or four piles of very thick books.

But it was only a hasty glance that the girls were able to give the room, as interesting as it seemed to be, for Mr. Whitney placed chairs for them and then hastily took the package of letters from John. They sat silently watching him and he opened package after package and read the contents and then took the little brown diary and read that through eagerly, too.

After he had finished with it he went back to the letters, keeping his finger in the open book and referring to it from time to time after he read certain letters. It seemed hours to the young people, watching him. But there is an end to all things and there came an end to his long silence.

"These are wonderful!" he cried enthusiastically. "Wonderful! And where did you say they were found?"

Of course they hadn't said before where they had been found, and John Van Horne rather impatiently, leaned forward and asked in somewhat of a strained voice.

"Are they real then? And valuable?"

"Real and valuable!" cried Mr. Whitney rather sharply. "Why of course they are, man!" And he repeated his question, "Where did you find them?"

Winnie related in as few words as possible their finding of the box in the cellar of the Van Horne Manor House. Mr. Whitney listened attentively to every detail then he turned back to John.

"If you want to sell these things to me, I'll pay you well," he said. "Some of them however, I think should be turned over to the Congressional Library. The diary for instance," and he handled the worn little book tenderly.

John and the girls looked at one another in delight. It was wonderful! Better than anything they had ever thought could be found in the old box. Mr. Whitney seemed to wait impatiently for John's answer. John however asked if he could go out of the room for a minute or two and think the matter over and decide what was best to do. So Mr. Whitney led the way to another doorway from the one they had entered by and carefully shut the large heavy door behind young Van Horne after he had gone through.

He came back to the girls and Louise jumped up.

"May I look around?" she asked.

"Certainly," he said politely and offered to show her the things most interesting, but she said with a shy little laugh.

"Thank you, but I'd just as soon browse around myself. I don't know very much about such things and I might ask you questions that would make you want to kill me, in all my ignorance."

"I'd promise not to do that," he answered. "But if you prefer to be alone, you are quite welcome."

Louise went down to the other end of the long room to make a systematic tour around the four walls. Left together at the top of the long room, Mr. Whitney and Winona were practically alone.

"You are Winona Merriam?" he asked, peering at her closely through his thick glasses.

"Yes," she answered smiling up at him.

"My wife mentions you in her letter," he said somewhat gruffly and added: "How is she, and how are the children?"

Winona only needed an opening to make her talk, and a subject that interested her as Mrs. Whitney and the children undoubtedly did. She had a delightful way of making

people see things through her mind's eyes as she talked. Now she told of meeting little Matilda on the train and of her bruised thumb and how this had led to their meeting Mrs. Whitney. Then the conversation turned to Thorndale and an accounting of all the things that had taken place there and because it was very fresh in her heart, being only a day away, she told it very clearly.

He seemed very much interested and asked her a great many questions. He sat in silence for a time after she had told him the story of Mrs. Van Duesen and the highboy and laughed over Mrs. Van Duesen's parting words. Then suddenly he said:

"You seem like a kind and sensible girl. I think I can trust you with a secret. Something which is quite near my heart."

Winnie didn't say anything, only nodded her head a little as he looked inquiringly at her as he spoke. He got up an pulled his chair a trifle closer to hers, after taking a hasty glance down the room to where Louise was standing, apparently engrossed, in the contents of one of the tall glass-fronted cases.

"A year ago," he said in his dry, somewhat detached way, "my wife and I were separated. Nothing legal of course; she simply felt that I was too deeply engrossed in my

hobby for my own good. She worried continually about my health, and, I thought then, fussed a great deal trying to keep me well. There was always something she wanted me to do, something hot to drink before I went to bed, or to remember to put on rubbers when I went out, and one thing that bothered me more than anything else was that she always called me sharply at eleven thirty to go to bed. Sometimes I would become so wrapped up in a volume of some sort pertaining to the subject I am so interested in, that I would find these little attentions very annoying. I know now that I must have been terribly irritable. And one night I became furiously angry, and spoke more bitterly to her than I had intended to do. It cut her to the heart, for up until then I had tried to hide my irritation from her, and now it came like a bolt from the blue, suddenly and shockingly. Well, to make a long story short, she took the children and left the house the next day, saying that she never realized that she had been in the way and that she would remain apart from me until I felt that I needed her back. She had no more than closed the door than I wanted her back, of course, but I was too proud to follow her as I was tempted to do, and beg her to return. So I let her go. From that day to this she does not know how I

feel. I still find it hard to admit being in the wrong. After all it was she who left me."

Winona jumped up and went over to him.

"Mr. Whitney," she said in a low voice. "I'm sure that Mrs. Whitney, like you, is too proud to make the first advances. Oh, couldn't you, for the children's sake, say the first word? All three of them love you dearly. We know, because all three of them have told me!"

Mr. Whitney looked up quickly.

"Do you mean that?" he cried. "Did *she* say that she loved me?"

"Yes," Winona said stoutly. "She did. The day she gave me the letter to give you, she told me that you were the cleverest and kindest man in the world and that she loved you."

Ten years seemed to slip from Mr. Whitney's shoulders as he jumped up from his chair and started to pace the floor, his hands buried deep in his pockets.

"She does love me," he repeated several times to himself as he walked back and forth, He lingered over the words as though he found them very sweet to say.

John Van Horne knocked on the door just then and came into the room.

"I've decided," he said firmly. "If I can call father up at the hotel where we

are staying, I'll ask him to take a taxi and come right over. I didn't bring him with me because I was afraid they might not be real, and I didn't want him to be here when you told me that!"

Mr. Whitney pointed to his desk, which had a telephone on it, and John went over and soon had arranged with his father to join them in ten minutes. Nothing more was said by the girls and Mr. Whitney of the conversation they had been having. He walked around the room with the three of them showing them his treasures. It was indeed a wonderful collection and he had just reason to be proud of it. He was pointing out a vacant place on one of the lower shelves where he was planning to put the letters of Benedict Arnold and Robert Morris, when the bell rang, and he went down to let in old Mr. Van Horne.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It took about an hour for the three men to complete their business. Mr. Whitney bought one of each of the letters and paid, what seemed to the girls and the Van Hornes, an exorbitant price for them. Then he called a taxi and offered to accompany them to a dealer on Fifth Avenue where he knew they would get the highest prices for some of the other letters.

"That diary should go to the Congressional Library in Washington!" he said as they drove off. "Also the command from Washington."

But the elder Van Horne held out when it came to the question of selling the diary. He wanted to keep that for himself. After all, a diary is a diary, and a personal accounting of his great-great-grandfather's life seemed too precious a thing to let go out of the family.

After they had been politely interviewed by the famous Fifth Avenue dealer and with his personal check tucked away in young Van Horne's bill-fold, had come out of the rather gloomy interior of his office, into the bright-

ness of Fifth Avenue, Louise looked down at her wrist watch and gave a little cry.

"Goodness! It's after two and we promised Helen to be home for lunch."

"I told her not to expect us later than one," Winnie said. "I was pretty sure we would be late with all the business we had to attend to."

"Then we'll have lunch somewhere together and make it a regular spree!" cried young Van Horne enthusiastically. "But is there anyone you would like especially to join us?"

"Of course they'd both like it better if they had their young friend Helen along," Mr. Van Horne said. "I'm sure they feel badly thinking of her sitting waiting for them."

"That's perfectly true, we do!" Louise said, but added: "The trouble is we haven't any telephone in the Little Crooked House."

"We'll have her with us inside of an hour!" cried young Van Horne boyishly, and dashed into a Western Union office which they happened to be passing at the time. Two minutes later he dashed out again, closely followed by a boy in a blue uniform.

"Quick, give me her address!" he cried to Winona who hurried, scribbled it down on the card he held out to her. He took it and gave it to the boy and slipped a couple of bills into

the eager and rather dirty hand. Like a shot the boy was off, running as fast as his blue legs could carry him toward Broadway and the nearest subway.

"What did you say in the message?" Louise asked, more from idle curiosity than anything else.

"I told her to meet us at Delmonicos," he said taking Louise's arm and walking on ahead with her, leaving Winnie to follow with the father, and Mr. Whitney who agreed to join them.

"I've never been there," Louise said ingenuously. "And I've always wanted to go."

"Everything comes to him who waits!" John quoted lightly. And led her up the few short steps to the entrance of the restaurant.

The head waiter led them to a table for five, in a corner and they settled down to wait for Helen.

The room was crowded with beautifully gowned women and young girls, some of the older women were accompanied by men, but others lunching alone in groups of four and five. The general atmosphere was one of gayety and Winnie looked across at Louise and smiled, in complete harmony with the surroundings.

They ordered luncheon, the girls choosing

things for Helen which they were sure she was particularly fond of, and then the business of the meal being attended to, they relaxed and proceeded to enjoy themselves. Under the cover of the general conversation of the other three, Mr. Whitney managed to say to Winona in a low tone:

"I am going to Thorndale tomorrow morning."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried and her face beamed with happiness.

"And thank you!" he said with a little effort.

Winnie flushed and met his eyes steadily as she answered impulsively:

"I think almost any girl would have done the same thing in this case. I think you can feel things like that. I felt that you loved her too, and it seemed such a shame for you both to be separated just because of a misunderstanding. Life is so very short!" After she had said it she was afraid she had gone too far, but he said, looking down at his plate and crumbling a bit of roll as he spoke:

"You are right. Life is very short and I am sorry that I have wasted five months of it."

Louise spied Helen standing in the doorway looking for them and John Van Horne

went across and brought her back to their table.

"It was lovely of you to remember me," she said in her poised way, after they had introduced Mr. Whitney and the men were again seated.

The party was made gayer by Helen's presence for the girls didn't worry about her being home by herself. The exceptional success of the sale of the letters had put Mr. Van Horne and his son into the highest spirits and Mr. Whitney too, with the thought of his coming trip seemed to shake off his rather diffident manner and became as interesting as he could be.

Looking back on it later the girls always remembered it as being one of the very nicest parties they had ever attended.

"As long as we're down-town let's call up the boys and ask them to take us to the Strand," Helen said, as the three of them, having left the men at the door of Delmonicos walked arm in arm together up Fifth Avenue looking into the shop windows.

So she called Charles up and he got Tom and Billy and at seven o'clock they met at the entrance of the Strand Theatre. The girls had their supper at a soda water fountain for they had eaten such a large lunch that they

were not hungry. It was quite easy to find six seats together for the hot summer weather made people seek the beaches and the lumbering busses and sight-seeing machines and the theatre was not crowded. But the theatre was so cool and the picture so interesting and the music so lovely that the girls and boys declared they were going to spend more evenings there after they returned from their vacations and had to drag through the longest and undoubtedly the hottest month of the year, August.

They got up very early the next morning so that they could get an early start to their home town. Helen and Charles went down with them to see them off and Helen felt almost too badly to wave a damp handkerchief after them. She wanted to be going home too, and as she and Charles turned to go out to the street she took his arm looking up into his face said wistfully:

"We'll be going home soon too, won't we? And we'll have at least the week-end after this with them up there, won't we?"

He promised that if it were at all possible she should have her looked for week-end and they went happily back to the rather lonely Little Crooked House.

"I'm going to tell you both something,"

Winnie said, leaning her head luxuriously back against the soft cushion of her train seat and looking at Tom and Louise across from her on a turned back seat.

"Go on!" commanded Louise. "I'm pretty sure it's a plan, but we can stand that. I've seen you put so many plans across that I have reached the stage where I only lay awake the first three nights after you tell me about them, worrying about what will happen if they don't go through."

Winnie laughed good-naturedly at Louise's ragging and went on to tell her and Tom about Mr. Whitney. Louise was as deeply thrilled and pleased as Winnie herself had been, and even Tom, the staid and never-getting-excited-person that he was, showed signs of approving of it all.

Their car happened to be the last one, so when the train stopped at their station they scrambled out way down at the far end and had to walk the entire length of the platform to get to the trolley which met all the trains and happened to take them directly past their homes.

Tom was walking ahead rather slowly and with his head bent, for he carried their three bags and they were all heavy. Louise and Winona followed behind with a fourth which

they were trying to carry together. They noticed a group of people at the far end of the platform but thought they were like themselves hurrying for the trolley and so paid very little attention to them. So when they heard a whoop in their ears and eager hands tried to take the bags from them, they were very much surprised. For the group consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Merriam, Florence, all of Louise's brothers and sisters, Mrs. Bryan, Helen's step-mother, once leader of the old Camp Karonya, Marie Hunter and Edith Hillis, Adelaide Hughes, and her younger sister Francis, and lots of other boy and girl friends of the bewildered trio, who now stood in a dazed stupid looking row, trying to get used to so many faces and answer so many greetings.

But it didn't take them long to get over their first surprise. They were as delighted to be seen as apparently their friends were to see them. Several people had driven down the boys and girls in their cars and now, spurning the little trolley which was still waiting patiently for them to make up their minds, climbed back into the automobiles and proceeded to drive swiftly away from the station.

"Why the swift flight of the swallows?" Louise asked, looking inquiringly around at the circle of faces of her family and Mr. and

Mrs. Merriam. "Edith Hillis was right in the middle of saying she wouldn't have known me, when Marie whisked her off. I'd have liked to have heard why she wouldn't have known me, whether it was because I was fatter or thinner, which I hope to goodness and flatter myself at the same time, that I am!"

Everyone laughed. It is very easy to laugh when you are happy and the group gathered around the young people were certainly so.

"You have made us very happy," Mrs. Merriam whispered to Louise a little while later as they rode up together in Louise's father's car. Louise blushed and ducked her head a minute to press a grateful little kiss on Mrs. Merriam's cheek.

"Tom's father and I have hoped for a long time that this would happen," Mrs. Merriam continued. "I shall love having you for a daughter almost as much as Winnie will love having you for her sister."

"So that was why everyone met us at the station!" Winnie cried. "They know of Louise's and Tom's engagement!"

"Of course," said Mrs. Merriam. "And they are all delighted too."

The car drove up to the Merriam's house first to let out Winnie and her mother and

father, and Tom. Florence had dashed away in one of the other cars with some of her young friends and now hopping up and down first on one foot then on the other, seemingly unable to wait for them to alight and come into the house.

"You will come in too, dear," Mrs. Merriam said, turning to Louise. "Your father and mother are waiting for you here. They couldn't get down to the train to meet you with the rest of us."

Louise waited for no second invitation to jump out and run into the house where her father and mother were waiting for her. There was a strong bond especially between the father and daughter and Louise's plan was to get enough business experience to be able to take over the responsibility of the large store her father owned. Her brothers had all chosen professional careers and this fact had been a deep disappointment to Mr. Lane.

Louise and Mr. and Mrs. Lane and the brothers and sisters finally walked over to their own home. Louise was the centre of the affectionate group and as they went together down the shady street she took her father's arm and gave a little prance from sheer lightness of heart.

"I'm so glad to be home again, and everyone is so kind," she said, and Mr. Lane pressed

her arm affectionately and the others smiled back at them.

Everyone left the girls and Tom alone that first evening, and they stayed with their respective families. But the following evening, after a great deal of mysterious telephoning between the two houses and running up and down stairs with covered things, hardly hidden under aprons, on the part of Louise's sister and Florence and Mrs. Merriam, a large square white envelope was pushed under the door of Winnie's room, where Louise, who ran over to get away from the feeling of being out of things, was sitting with her friend. They had been discussing their homes and the changes they had found in the girls and boys who had met them at the station and had both almost forgotten the rather hurt way they had felt at being treated as though they were strangers and not allowed in on any of the exciting secrets the two families seemed to be whispering about continuously.

Louise had her back to the door, as she was sitting on the window-seat idly playing with the cord on the shade and looking out into the darkness of the moonless night. Winnie was busy sewing and so did not notice the envelope either, as it lay near the door. It must have been a good hour after it had been slipped

under the door that Louise got up and walked over to the dressing table and as she did so passed it and stooped and picked it up.

"What is this?" she asked looking at Winnie as though she expected to find the solution of the secret written on her friend's face.

Winnie shook her head. "I'm sure I don't know," she said. "Why don't you open it?"

"That's a good idea," Louise said dryly, and proceeded to tear off the end of the envelope and shake out its contents. She unfolded a thick sheet of writing paper on which was printed:

"There will be a meeting of the Camp Fire at nine o'clock. Please try to be there promptly."

"The Camp Fire!" Winnie cried in amazement. "What can that mean? It can't be *ours,* Camp Karonya, for that had been disbanded for ages. It must be Florence's or ——!"

Louise looked at her wrist watch and hurried to the door.

"A Camp Fire is a Camp Fire for a' that!" she cried, and added: "And its rules must be obeyed. It's two minutes to nine now."

Winona followed her closely down the stairs. At the door of the living room they

hesitated and looked in. The room was dark save for the light from a leaping wood fire in the large stone fireplace. Somewhere in the soft darkness someone was beating a drum. The girls hearts gave a little leap of happiness at the sound, for the drum beating called them to their Camp Fire meetings and suddenly the curtain of the years that had seemed to shut them away from their Camp Fire days and all that they had meant to them, rolled away. In their hearts was the same thrill that the sound of the drum had awakened there years ago when they had had their first meeting at Winnie's house in this same room.

"Oh, Louise isn't it lovely?" Winona said with a suspicion of tears in her voice. "They've opened the door into the past for us and we can go through for awhile."

Louise didn't answer, she only took Winnie's hand and gripped it tightly and Winnie knew that she understood.

Their eyes were accustomed to the darkness by this time and the black shadows in the room assumed the shapes of girls sitting cross-legged in a circle on the floor. Rather shyly Winona and Louise went forward to the vacant places left them. As they looked around and their gaze rested first of all upon Helen Bryan, Grace's step-mother, Mrs. Bryan, who had

been their first Guardian and had helped them organize and start their Camp Fire. They looked at her affectionately now, as she stood in her straight brownish gown with its deep fringes at the bottom.

"Welcome!" she said in her clear voice. "Welcome back into the circle of the Camp Fire."

"It *is* our Camp Fire!" Winona whispered excitedly to Louise, for she had time by now to look around and recognize the girls sitting on the floor.

Mrs. Bryan heard Winona's whisper and looked at her and smiled.

"Yes, it is our own Camp Fire," she said. "No doubt you are all somewhat surprised to be called to a meeting of it for it has been disbanded for such a long time. But I wanted to call this meeting, which may be the last one we shall ever have, for reasons of my own."

She paused for a minute as though to collect her thoughts and Winona looked around the circle of girlish faces. In the dancing light of the fire the faces seemed almost childlike and for a moment Winnie imagined herself back in the old days. She sat watching them, happy in her day dream, and then Mrs. Bryan began to speak again.

"Sisters of the Camp Fire," she said, "I

have wanted for a long time to call you together so that I could tell you, from the bottom of my heart, how proud I am of you all. We have been separated, we have returned, each with a greater knowledge of life, each with a clearer vision and a broader understanding. Several of you have had your dearest dreams come true. The dreams you found the material for here in our Camp Fire Circle. Some of you are still dreaming, some are waiting almost impatiently for their dreams to come true. I have watched you all, I know I speak truly. I think that it may help the girls who are still waiting, perhaps feeling discouraged and that it is almost impossible to go on, to hear the realized dreams of some of you more fortunate ones. Therefore I am going to ask you each to tell your dearest dream and the outcome of it."

Winnie sat up very straight and watched Mrs. Bryan's face earnestly. Dreams! Why, Mrs. Bryan was saying almost the same thing about them that Billy Lee had said! He must have been right after all.

Mrs. Bryan glanced around the group and nodded to Marie Hunter.

"Will you begin, Marie?" she asked.

Marie arose to her feet.

"I'd love to." she said, and then added

modestly: "I'm afraid my dream was a very ambitious one for me to have. I think you have all known that I always wanted to become a writer. I remember how you used to tease me and call me a book-worm and how I always was going around reading everything I could lay my hands on. Louise used to say that if I couldn't get anything else, I'd read the testimonials on the Vanilla Extract bottles or in the back of the kitchen almanac, something that nobody else in the world ever did!"

The girls laughed, for they remembered well Marie's passion for reading.

"Well," Marie went on looking down at her hands which were clasped before her, "I used to lie in bed at night and plan how I would become a famous author and how someday I would come to a meeting just as though nothing had happened, and say nonchalantly during a pause, Well girls, I've sold a story to each of the leading magazines, I've had a play accepted and coming out on Broadway next month, it's in rehearsal now, and I've a book of poems accepted and coming out in the spring, and at present I am working on a novel, which my publisher says is going to be the most popular and most discussed book ever printed in America. That was a modest enough dream wasn't it? Then of course you were all

to dash up and make a terrible fuss over me, and that was that! I'm afraid I always liked that part of the dream best. Anyway, dreams come true. I know. Because here is the Camp Fire, here are you all, with the exception of Nataly Lee and Helen Bryan, and here am I now standing before you to tell you, that I've had my first story accepted, and although it isn't by one of the leading magazines, and I haven't even received my check for it yet and have no idea when I will, I am as pleased and happy as I can be and every bit as proud as I would have been with all my other ambitions realized too. Now, all I have to wait for to have my dream complete, are your congratulations."

Of course the girls all jumped up and dashed over to her and made a terrible fuss over her, and Louise capped the climax by begging for her signature, then and there, and vowing she would value it as her dearest possession ever after. After the excitement had died down a bit and the girls were again seated in the circle but still talking excitedly about Marie's success, Mrs. Bryan raised her hand for silence and asked Edith Hillis if she would talk to them next.

Edith Hillis was small and fair and fluffy. She had a childish, naïve way of looking at life in general and as is so often the case, was

terribly fond of Marie Hunter, who was her exact opposite. Edith had gone to college only because of Marie, and her first six months had been none to easy. She had always been interested in dancing and decided that as long as she couldn't be a shining light in her classes at least she could specialize in æsthetic dancing, which she immediately began to do. She looked scarcely more than a child as she stood up to talk to the girls.

" My dream, although quite as ambitious as Marie's, was never as firmly fixed in my mind as hers. I used to think that some day I'd be a famous dancer, and then after I had the costume all planned for my debut, I'd think how lonely I'd be, being a dancer all by myself, day after day, traveling alone and having to go all over the country and leave everyone I liked the best, for ages. Then I'd think to myself, I guess I'll be an author. There's lots of demand for light fiction. And then, I could live with Marie Hunter in New York in a nice apartment with a kitchenette. So you see, I wasn't always true to my dream. But the next day I'd go to my class in Journalism and I'd come out in tears vowing never to become anything but a dancer, and that if dancing would take me away from the hateful Professor of Journalism, I'd get a position that would take me to

California at once. I'd get a little praise later from my dancing teacher and I'd be gayly off on my dancing dream again. I kept that up for ages, the Journalism Professor frankly told me there was no use in my trying to be a writer. I'd decided that dancing was for me after all. And now do you know what has happened? It seems almost too good to be true. I've had a small part offered me in a New York production and I'm to have an apartment with Marie in New York. Oh, I'm so happy about it all."

The girls were delighted and Louise begged Edith to tell them if she had planned her costume for her debut yet. Edith said she had, and added that she was planning to send the girls tickets for the opening night, which was to be the following month.

"Adelaide next!" Mrs. Bryan said, and Adelaide, a tall, thin red-brown-haired girl stood up in her place and smiled around at the friendly faces.

"I'm afraid my dream will sound very dull after Marie's and Edith's," she said, "and besides it really wasn't my *own* dream. I think you will all remember that I used to feel terribly bad because I was poorer than the rest of you, and I wanted to be able to give better parties and have pretty dresses and

things like that, but I didn't know how to dream in those days. I simply used to sit around and feel sorry for myself and the children and think it was a shame that we didn't have as much as the rest of you. And then one day I determined that Lonny and Frances should have more than I had ever had. Then Louise and Winona helped me by telling me what I could do. From that time on I began to dream. I began to make money and I got Frances pretty clothes and I gave nice parties and I've been able to help both Lonny and Frances through college. I made up my mind they would have things and they have. I'm sorry I haven't any surprise in store for you. Making jams and cakes and running a cafeteria is a paying business but it doesn't sound very exciting. You've all known about this, so you won't be surprised. But it has been a lovely dream and I have been happy dreaming it. I'm sorry I haven't anything else to tell you."

She sat down and the congratulations she received were given in a deeper, gentler way than those the other girls had had. The Camp Fire circle remembered the hard work and love that had gone into the realization of Adelaide's dream and they tried to tell her that they knew.

"I have a letter from Nataly," Mrs. Bryan

said after awhile, smiling somewhat ruefully as she glanced down at it in her hand.

"Dear Opeechee and Girls," she read. "I am sorry that I can't get up to the Camp Fire meeting. I planned to, but something has intervened, I would have liked to have seen the girls, especially when I tell them my news. I'm engaged! I know the girls are going to be green with envy for I suppose none of them have thought of such a thing. My fiancé's name is Richard Hardwick Randolph Rochester."

"Is she marrying a king with all those names?" Louise said in a whisper to Winona who nodded her head gayly.

"He is a millionaire," Mrs. Bryan went on and again Louise looked at Winona and smiled knowingly. The smile said as plainly as words. "How like sweet Nataly."

Nataly Lee had always been a very languid, very fine-lady kind of girl. She was always inclined to think that her affairs were the most important in the world and that everyone was tremendously interested in them. She evidently thought so still, for she went into detailed accounts of Richard Hardwick Randolph Rochester's habits, personal feelings, looks, family connections and finally wound up with a detailed account of what he had said

and what she had said when he proposed to her.

There was a little burst of applause after Mrs. Bryan finished but there was little enthusiasm in them.

"I think it is hardly necessary for me to tell you all that Helen is living in the very middle of her dream at this minute," Mrs. Bryan went on, referring to the other empty place in the Circle. "She sent a telegram asking me to give you all her love and to tell you how disappointed she is not being with you."

Everyone was really sorry that Helen wasn't able to be there. She had always been a favorite with the girls. Mrs. Bryan sat down and another girl told of her dream. At last Louise's turn came. She got up and stood before them half laughing, half serious.

"I know you girls are going to be green with envy," she began, quoting from Nataly's letter. "I'm engaged!"

She paused and looked all around but one or two girls called out: "We know it!"

"Well, as long as none of you will turn green with envy, I'll go on. No doubt I shall be thought bold and unmaidenly by some of you but I can't help that! The truth of the matter is that my dream has been a very material one for a long, long time. It had heighth and breadth, hair, eyes and beautiful teeth and it

answers to the name of Tom Merriam. Added to the above charms it is Winona Merriam's brother, and therefore has a decided added attraction to me. And now I have my dream and I hope I'm going to marry it very soon. I thank you."

She made a funny little bow and dropped down on the floor again while Edith Hillis cried:

"Louise! I never thought it of you! To stand before the entire Camp Fire and confess that you've been dreaming about Tom Merriam for years! I honestly can't believe it!"

"Oh, love is a terrible thing!" Louise quoted lightly. "Wait until it comes to you. You'll find it hard not to take everyone in your audience, into your confidence, when you are dancing, and tell them all about your lover. Look at Nataly, she spared us nothing of Richard Hardwick Randolph Rochester's past present or future."

Mrs. Bryan smiled and then she said:

"Louise is right, Edith. Love isn't anything to be ashamed of. So many people think it ought to be secondary in life. It is the biggest thing that ever comes to any of us and we should be glad and proud of it. We oughtn't to be so silly about it. I don't mean that. We oughtn't to sit around all day moon-

ing over a fiancé's picture or the last letter he wrote but we ought to consider love a gift and treat it as such. I hope that it will come to you all sometime and that you recognize it at once. But until it does, be true to your ideal of it. That is all I ask."

"And now for Winona's dream," she said affectionately.

Winona looked helplessly all around. "I don't know what to do," she said. "I've been trying to remember a dream as I listened to yours and I honestly can't. There has been first one thing and then another and I don't ever seem to have had a dream that lasted."

Mrs. Bryan broke in and said:

"Perhaps I can help you, Winnie."

Winona looked at her gratefully, and Mrs. Bryan continued.

"Last winter I believe Winona dreamed the largest dream she ever had. Down deep in all of our hearts is a feeling that we want to help those more needy than ourselves. I think that everyone has it sometime or another. Some of us never can do anything about it. Others simply keep putting it off and thinking they'll look around the next day and find a way to help, in these cases sometimes they put it off so long that it fades and they forget all about it and go on to something else. But

Winona, and Louise too, put their hearts and minds to helping and they found a place where they could. And then came two opportunities to Winona to choose between her work and a life of decided pleasure and what is known as ease. But her dream of helping others was so deeply implanted in her heart that without hesitation she decided to stay at the Garnett Neighborhood House and help as much as she could the people in that poor section of New York. She was true to her dream, and she was true to her Camp Fire ideals."

Here she stopped, for Winnie had scrambled to her feet and was now standing with her cheeks flushed, waiting for a chance to speak:

"Oh, Opeechee dear!" she cried, "I don't deserve any praise. Honestly I don't. It really took me an awfully long time to make up my mind and there have been lots of times, especially lately, when I've wondered if I did right in choosing my work in the Garnett House. So you see, all of you, that I'm really not worthy of any praise at all!"

"You are too," Louise said stoutly, "You're lots more deserving than almost anyone else here. I'll frankly tell everyone that if I had had the opportunity to go south or to

England, I would have packed my little bag and camped at the station or the dock so the person I was going with would have had to have taken me, because of a scene if they tried to stop me."

They all laughed and it was evident they agreed with Louise, for Winona was the centre of the laughing congratulating group in a minute.

"But what shall I do?" she managed to say a little while later looking all around at them but letting her eyes rest the longest on Mrs. Bryan as though asking for help. "I haven't any dream now, honestly I haven't. Where can I find one?"

Mrs. Bryan shook her head and said lightly.

"We'll talk it over some time, Winnie dear," and let it go at that.

It was Marie Hunter who proposed that they sing their cheer, and they were at once all on their feet and gathered around their Guardian. None of them had forgotten the words:

"Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo for work,
Wohelo for health,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for love!"

they sang in unison. Then someone turned on the lights and Florence and Mrs. Merriam came in with plates of sandwiches and glass pitchers of lemonade.

As she bent to kiss Winona goodnight a little while later, Mrs. Bryan whispered in her ear:

"Come and see me tomorrow if you have time." And Winnie whispered: "Yes."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

After they had gone Mrs. Merriam called Winona. She was sitting before the dull ashes in the fireplace and although it was July, it had been such a cold wet day that the warmth of the fire had been pleasant. Winnie sat down at her feet, and rested her head against her mother's knees. It was the way she had always loved to sit when she was small and she could feel a little-girl feeling slipping over her.

Mrs. Merriam rested a gentle hand on Winona's brown hair and smoothed it lovingly. Neither spoke for awhile, watching the pictures of her own imagination in the rapidly greying ashes. Then Winona said in a low voice:

"Mother, it was a lovely meeting tonight. I don't suppose I'll ever be able to feel as happy with new people as I do with the Camp Fire girls, and Opeechee is such a darling. But I'm worried about myself. Tonight when every girl told her dream, I didn't have any when it came to my turn. I never used to be that way. I always was so sure of everything when I was younger. But lately, there seem to be two me's living inside my body. Oh, Mother, what do you think it is? I'm not so happy, being this way."

Mrs. Merriam stroked Winona's hair without answering for awhile, then she said:

"Ever since you were a little girl you have been a dreamer. Did you ever happen to think that perhaps you've had more realized than most people. Every time you have a plan, it was a dream. And think of all the plans you have had work out! I don't think there is anything to worry about. I think you have just reached the place now in your life when you aren't quite sure where to turn next for a new dream. Perhaps you have one deep down in your heart that no one knows about but you. Perhaps you are not quite sure it is there, yourself. Is there anything you would like to talk over with me?"

Winona sat up and turned around so that she could lean her folded arms on her mother's lap and look directly up into her face.

"Do you know, Mother, Billy Lee said almost exactly the same thing to me, last week up in Thorndale. Opeechee said it tonight at the Camp Fire. Now, you are saying it. There must be something to it. Louise said she used to feel the same way I do. As though she was waiting for a curtain to go up. I feel all neat and tidy inside of me, and waiting for something. Oh, waiting so hard for something, that I'm afraid to go away from my

neat and tidy mind for a minute, lest I should be out when this something I am waiting for comes. It's an awfully funny feeling. But I asked her tonight if she still felt that way and she laughed and said not since she had become engaged to Tom."

Mrs. Merriam smiled tenderly.

"She's found a new dream, you see," she said gently.

"Oh, she told the entire meeting this evening that Tom had been her dream for years!" Winona said, half laughing at the remembrance of Louise's confession.

"She couldn't be quite sure of it, until Tom asked her to marry him," Mrs. Merriam went on to explain. "I think the proposal was the curtain she was waiting for to go up. Perhaps yours will go up soon, too."

But Winnie shook her head.

Not if the curtain is a proposal!" she said ligntly. "If it's wanting someone to propose to me I'm sure that can't be the reason. I don't know of a person I think of the way Louise does Tom and Helen does Charles. I'm fond of so many people! But love, I don't honestly think I know what it means, outside of my own family and Louise, though I suppose you'd call her my own family now."

"Well, you are too young to worry about

it now," Mrs. Merriam said sensibly, and turned the conversation to Florence.

"She seems to be much happier and gayer," Winona said warmly. "She was perfectly sweet tonight to the girls and helped with the refreshments like a little angel. But tell me, what has happened to Professor Joyce? You never mentioned him in any of your letters."

"His wife and children live here now, too," Mrs. Merriam said. "They came from Plainfield directly after school closed. Someone finally rented their cottage there. Florence has become very friendly with Mrs. Joyce. She gives her now almost as much love and admiration as she did the Professor."

Winona sighed.

"Florence is such an extremist," she said. "It seems so long ago that she came down to stay with us to get over her love affair with the Professor. I often wonder if she took it very much to heart."

"It is hard to tell with Florence," Mrs. Merriam said, knitting her brows in thought. "She was terribly infatuated by him, but as far as I know, she came home from her visit to you, completely cured, and the next day, almost, Andrew came up to see her and has been coming ever since."

"Tom said she was simply infatuated with

the Professor because he was the first man out of his teens to talk to her besides father," Winnie said laughingly.

"I think Tom was right," Mrs. Merriam said. "Affairs like that are never serious. He is old enough almost to be her father."

"Has Andrew been up here lately?" Winona asked, smiling to herself at the memory of the red-haired, deep-dimpled, happy-go-lucky Andrew.

"Yes, indeed," Mrs. Merriam said. "He was out only last week for dinner and this spring he came to several of the high school baseball games. The boys and girls seem to like him and I think Florence likes it because he is on the same paper with Tom and although he's really only their ages, he is quite looked up to as a man of the world by the high school boys."

Winona couldn't help laughing. She loved her mother's sense of humor which could always see the funny side of things. She knew just how Florence was lording it over the others and how much she was enjoying it.

"Well Andrew can't bring her to any harm," she said, reaching up to kiss her mother's thin cheek affectionately. "Poor mother, you'll soon have Tom off your hands, and I don't suppose Florence will sow any

more wild oats, and I promise you I'll be good—and then you'll have a little chance to rest and not worry about any of us for a time."

Mrs. Merriam looked up at Winona and smiled happily.

"Worries about your children aren't really worries," she said softly. "No matter how dark things may look, down deep in every mother's heart is the fact that she is mighty glad she had children to worry about. Everyone says this. You wait and see."

Tom came in just then from taking Louise home and now he came over and put an affectionate arm around his mother's shoulders. She stood up and Winona linked her arm through her's and the three of them walked together out into the hall. Mr. Merriam came out of his study just then, and said laughingly that they looked like the picture of the Gracchi, only Tom and Winona were pretty good-sized jewels.

Winona kissed her mother goodnight at the doorway of her own little pink room. Then she went in and closed her door.

The room had been kept exactly as she had left it, when she had gone down to New York to live in the Little Crooked House. Its pink draperies were somewhat faded and there were dark patches on the wall where pictures

had been removed to be taken with her to New York. But the school and high school pennants were still on the walls and framed snap-shots hung here and there, having been scorned as too old fashioned to be taken to New York. Winona stopped now before one of them. It was a group of the Camp Fire girls with their Guardian. It had been taken soon after they had organized it. Perhaps the girl who stood out most distinctly in the laughing group was Winnie herself. And next to her was Louise, short and rather stocky in those days, her arm thrown affectionately around Winnie's shoulders. How happy they all had been. How they had laughed and joked about posing for this picture. Winnie gave the glass that covered it, a gentle little pat with her hand.

She undressed slowly and after she was in bed with the light out, she lay awake thinking for a time.

The last thing she was conscious of remembering was repeating over and over to herself the words of the Camp cheer:

"Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo for work,
Wohelo for health,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for love!"

The days of their vacation passed quickly and soon the time came to return to the city.

Winona went to see Mrs. Bryan as she had promised and had two long delightful hours with her. Several of the Camp Fire girls gave informal teas and one or two had the Circle for lunch. But there was no other formal meeting. Somehow everyone knew that the last one had been final.

August was a long hot month and life went along pretty much the same in the Little Crooked House. But with the first of September Tom's paper sent him to Albany to cover the coming State election and that left a room vacant. They talked it over and decided to find someone to take it for the two months Tom would be away, although he offered to pay room rent. But Helen and Charles and Winona knew that Tom and Louise were saving money so that they could be married as soon as possible, so they didn't want him to do that.

Tom went to Albany before they were able to find anyone. And then one morning a deep black-bordered letter came for Winona. She looked at it lying at her place, with that quick little clutch at her heart that everyone experiences at the sight of a mourning letter. Next to a telegram they are the most frightening things to receive. She sat down and read

her other mail before even glancing at the handwriting. But finally there was nothing left to do but open it. She picked it up gingerly between her thumb and finger and turned it over so that she could see the handwriting.

"Oh, it's from Sonia!" she cried, proceeding to tear it open hurriedly. She read it through then passed it to Helen and Louise.

"Sonia's mother is dead," she said to Charles.

"I wonder what she'll do now, poor thing," Helen said looking up from the letter.

"She's absolutely by herself," Winona said thoughtfully. "I'm awfully sorry for her."

"We'll go up and see her after dinner tonight," Louise said, "That is if you want to go," she added.

Winona thanked her and then they had to go down to business and breakfast broke up.

They found Sonia red-eyed and still hysterical, that evening when they went up to the little apartment she had shared with her mother. She had lost absolutely all control of her feelings and upon seeing the girls threw herself down upon the floor, beating it, as hard as she could, with her clenched fists.

Winona and Louise looked helplessly at one another. Billy had called up that evening

before they went out and Winona had told him where they were going so he had offered to take them in his car. Now, he was waiting down-stairs for them. Winona looked around and seeing an open window went over and looked out. She could see Billy sitting in the car, smoking a cigarette. Sonia's apartment was only on the second floor so it was quite easy for Winona to raise her voice and call him. He looked up instantly and seeing her beckoning to him, he jumped out and came up the stairs two at a time.

"What's the matter?" he asked coming hurriedly into the room. "Do you need me?"

Sonia had ceased her sobbing and now lay in an inert heap at their feet. Winona pointed to her silently. Billy bent over her.

"Sonia," he said almost sharply, "get up at once!"

She seemed not to have heard him, for she gave no sign and still lay there. He waited for a minute or two then bent over and lifted her up in his arms and carried her to an arm chair. There wasn't anything for her to do but sit up when he put her in a chair. But she assumed the most tragic pose possible, with her head resting back against the shabby cushion and her arms hanging loosely over the sides of the

chair. Her eyes were tightly shut and to all appearances she had fainted.

Billy only shook his head at Winona when she whispered excitedly: "What shall we do?"

"She hasn't fainted," he said loud enough for her to hear and it was evident she did, for she sat up and brushed her streaming hair out of her eyes and said in her most tragic tones:

"I was!"

It was all Louise could do to keep from laughing aloud. But Winnie felt too sorry for Sonia to see the funniness of it.

"I cannot stay here alone!" she cried tragically. "I have but buried my mother to-day. I cannot stay here alone!"

"This is dreadful!" Winnie said to herself, then taking Louise over to a corner she whispered earnestly to her for a few minutes. Whatever she was saying didn't seem to interest or thrill Louise very much but she finally seemed to agree and they came back to Billy.

"We've decided to take Sonia home with us," Winona explained. "It would be dreadful for her to stay here alone."

"Well, it is your Little Crooked House and I suppose you can do what you want to," Billy said turning away and going toward the window to see if his car was still below, for the neighborhood was bad and leaving a good look-

ing car standing alone was a dangerous thing to do. He discovered the running board black with children and decided to go down and sit in it.

"I'll wait for you, and for goodness sake hurry," he said as he left the apartment.

"I should have been all alone!" Sonia went on crying, wringing her hands and beginning to cry again now that Billy had gone.

"Let's hurry up," said Louise the practical.

"Where is your bag, Sonia? I'll pack it, if you like."

Sonia pointed languidly at a door which apparently led into the bedroom, and then suddenly she was on her feet and at the door first. She stood with her back to it, holding the knob in her hands.

"I shall make haste," she said, rather shakily and went in and closed the door behind her.

"What do you know about that?" Louise said blankly, and Winona shook her head.

It couldn't have taken Sonia two minutes to pack her bag and put on her hat with its deep black bordered crepe veil, and come out to them again.

Louise took the bag and with a girl on either side of her they went down the stairs. As they were opening the street door, a tall rather slim

dark girl hurried up the short flight of stone steps of the entrance and met them face to face.

"Why Sonia," she said in surprise, looking closely at the two girls as she spoke. "Where are you going? You asked me to spend the night with you and here I am, but you seem to be going away!"

Louise put down the bag and dropped Sonia's arm. She had told them she had to be alone that night. Pity for Sonia never lasted very long as far as Louise was concerned.

Winnie too, dropped her arm and Sonia stood alone facing the dark girl.

"I could not bear to be in that place, even with you," she said, "so when these kind friends offered me a place with them, I go with them."

"So I see," said the friend hotly. "Well, you can go and stay for all of me," and she added spitefully, turning to Winnie as she said it, "I wish you well with her. She is a leech."

"That isn't a nice way to talk to her now when she is in trouble!" Winona said calmly. "She is so upset she doesn't know what she is doing. Come on Sonia," and she stooped and picked up the bag and proceeded to lead Sonia to Billy's car.

It was only Louise who caught the triumphant glint that shot from Sonia's eyes as she got into the comfortable car. The girl still stood

watching them, her brows knit with ill-temper and she too saw it, and the storm on her face became blacker than ever.

"There is nothing to do but let Winnie find out for herself," Louise said with a sigh, as she and Billy sat together in front while Winona sat with grief-stricken Sonia in the rear.

When they got home, Helen helped the girls prepare Tom's room for Sonia and after she was established there, they held a council in the living room.

"I think she's come to live with us for good!" Louise said bluntly. "There's a look in her eyes."

"Louise, I don't understand why you are so unkind to Sonia," Winona said almost impatiently. "Why is it?"

But Louise only shook her head and didn't answer.

But it turned out that Louise was right. Sonia postponed her going from day to day, until they got so used to having her around that they were beginning to think no more about it. She had insisted upon paying board after she had been there several days. At first they had refused, then had accepted it, and she made arrangements to have her things sent from the apartment, which she had sub-let, until she could find another place to live.

There were one or two quite dreadful times, when Sonia broke every rule of simple courtesy. But for Winona's sake, the others overlooked these things, and after awhile she became more accustomed to their ways.

She must have been with them a month, when one day Winona received a Marconigram from Roger. It was sent to the Garnett House and it pleased Winona very much by the important-lookingness of it and because it was the first one she had ever seen. She ran to show it to Louise who admired it dutifully and asked:

"Whatever does it say? You've showed me the envelope and the paper itself but you haven't told me the message."

Winona broke into a merry laugh.

"How perfectly stupid of me!" she said. "It's from Roger and he says he is docking this afternoon."

"How calmly you take it!" Louise said teasingly. "I remember the time when you would have been dashing around in circles in excitement."

"Oh, I'm getting more dignified," Winona said lightly, flushing a little as she always did when Louise teased her.

Louise took her arm affectionately and said:

"I'm sorry I teased. Let's ask Mr. Collins

if we can get off for an hour at two o'clock instead of our regular lunch hour at twelve."

"That's a wonderful thought!" cried Winona and they went and asked Mr. Collins, who readily agreed.

Just as they were going down the stairs they met Sonia. She was coming for a class in Journalism, for through sheer aggressiveness she had made a place for herself in the Garnett House, and with her fine executive ability had organized a class which had become one of the features of the Neighborhood House's volunteer activities.

She stood against the rail to allow them to pass and as Winona went by she said:

"We're going down to the dock to meet Roger."

"Roger Mendon!" Sonia said suddenly alert, and drew her heavy black brows together. "That is why you are looking so happy!" she said to Winnie, pointing at her flushed cheeks.

"Perhaps it is," Louise answered shortly for her friend and took Winnie's arm and hurried her out to the street.

Sonia stood watching the door which still quivered from the shock of being shut so hurriedly by Louise. Her eyes were thoughtful as she turned to go upstairs. She was impatient with the duller children sometimes, but

today the entire class was aware of her irritability, but being of a class in life who learn early to accept things with a certain calm indifference they went about their work and thought no more about it than they had to.

There was a regular old time party around the fire in the Little Crooked House that evening. Roger seemed to be more charming than ever and Winnie found herself comparing his handsome regular features with the less regular ones of Billy Lee. But she couldn't have told herself which face she found the most pleasing. Roger had raised a little mustache, so small as to hardly change him, but still it did, in a way that intrigued Winona and made her watch him more closely than usual, trying to find just where the difference lay.

Once or twice Winnie felt the piercing eyes of Sonia fixed on her, and strangely, it made her feel very uncomfortable. There was such a watching look in them. Finally she felt that she could stand them no longer so got up and changed her seat, going around to sit by Louise and hiding herself as much as possible behind her friend. Sometimes she almost wished that Sonia would take her much talked of departure. Tonight especially she didn't seem to fit into the picture of the Little Crooked House at all. The evening was quite spoiled for Winona.

She felt self-conscious and not at all at home. She was glad when it was over.

Roger must have been in New York a week, when one day he asked Winona if she would have dinner and go to the theatre afterwards with him. She joyfully accepted. Theatres were a treat to the girls nowadays, for Billy and Tom, who generally took them, were no longer available, Tom being in Albany and Billy having to work very late some nights, so late indeed that on other nights he didn't feel very much like doing anything but going directly to bed after his dinner.

It was to be a dress-up party. Winona scurried home early from the Garnett House and bathed and dressed herself in her prettiest frock. Louise loaned her her gloves because they were newer than Winona's, and Helen let her wear a gold bar pin of hers which Winona admired very much. Six o'clock came but no Roger. Louise posted herself where she could see the corner he would have to turn on his way from the subway. Winona sat, pretending to read, on the most uncomfortable chair in the room. It must have been fully quarter of seven when a taxi drew up to the door and Roger jumped out and told the man to wait.

Louise ran to open the door for him and

Winona took a final look at herself in the long glass before turning to greet him. He looked very handsome in his evening clothes and now with his eyes taking in every detail of her costume and seeming to approve of it all, Winona felt a little thrill of happiness that she was going to have dinner and spend the evening with him.

"And where do you want to go to dinner?" he asked her later as he stood at the entrance to the taxi, looking in at her and waiting to direct the man.

"There is a French place I've always wanted to go to," she answered eagerly, and told him the name. He directed the man and then got in and they rode off much to the mock admiration of Louise who pretended to be overcome by the grandness of the sight.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

WINONA could never quite forget that dinner with Roger in the French restaurant. Roger exerted himself to amuse her and please her. She felt that she was looking and acting her best for Roger's eyes told her so every-time she met them across the small white-clothed table.

After dinner they went to the theatre and the early glamour of the evening was still over everything when, after the final curtain, they found themselves on Broadway. Roger summoned a taxi and Winona sank luxuriously back in the comfortableness of it. She found herself looking at the people walking past, or waiting at the crossings for the releasing whistle of the traffic policeman to blow, and though she hated herself the next minute for feeling as she did, she couldn't help being glad that she was not one of them. The taxi turned into the wide entrance to Central Park at Fifty-ninth Street to escape the congested traffic of upper Broadway. The soft air of the fall night was almost as warm as summer and the top of the taxi was open and many of the trees

still had leaves clinging to them here and there, loathing to die, poor things.

Suddenly Roger said:

"Winnie, aren't you ever coming to England?"

Winona's mood of luxuriousness departed, leaving her keenly alive to the atmosphere which seemed suddenly to have become electrified. She sat up very straight and drew her cape a little more closely about her. She felt that something was going to happen, but why she felt as she did, she could not say. Surely there was nothing in Roger's question that was different than when he had asked it before.

And then something did happen. Suddenly and entirely out of a clear sky. Roger turned to her and taking both her hands blurted out, in an impulsive decidedly boyish way, and not at all like the cooly sophisticated Roger she had been admiring all evening.

"Winnie dear, I can't pretend any longer. I've got to tell you that I love you and that I have for years. Please dear, could you and would you ever marry me?"

And so it had happened at last! Her first proposal. She was conscious of this fact, even while she could feel Roger's hands gripping hers so hard that it hurt. And then suddenly she felt herself being swept along by the tide

of his emotion. She felt a little warm glow at her heart. Was this perhaps the beginning of the dream she had been waiting for? Could Roger and England be the new delightful dream where she would find all that Helen and Louise had found in theirs? She turned impulsively to Roger and smiled, a rather twisty little smile, and let her hands still lie imprisoned in his while she answered him.

"Oh, Roger," she said, "I wish I knew. I know its a terribly silly thing to say, but I suppose girls will go on saying it the world over, forever, but really your asking me to marry you, *is* sudden. I've honestly never thought of such a thing. Sometimes lately I wondered about love and marriage. Lots more than I ever did before in my life possibly because Louise is going to marry Tom and I'm with her so much that of course, I hear all her plans for the future. I'd give anything to be Louise. She says she never for a moment thought of anyone else after the first time she saw Tom, and goodness knows that was years ago!"

"I've never thought of anyone else but you since I first met you!" Roger broke in almost indignantly, as though he didn't want Louise to walk away with *all* the laurels of faithfulness.

"Never once?" Winona asked more out of curiosity than because she doubted his word. It seemed then, that men felt the same way as Louise and Helen did about Tom and Charles. Winona's feelings in the matter were really those of someone who watched, rather than those of an actual participant. But Roger's next words brought her back again to the fact that after all it was her own proposal and she had to decide something about it.

"Will you marry me, Winnie?" Roger asked again, ignoring her question as though it were silly of her to think even for a minute that he could have ever been interested in anyone else.

"I don't know!" Winona said truthfully. "Honestly I don't know whether I love you even, I'll have to think it over before I can give you any answer to that question."

"But Winnie dear," Roger persisted, "I should think you'd know if you loved me. Why that's an easy thing to know! Do you like to be with me? Do you feel glad when I come into the room? Were you glad to get my Marconigram and to hear I was on my way to America?"

Winona looked at him with her brows knit in perplexity. She could truthfully answer "yes" to all of these questions. Was being

able to answer "yes" being in love? It all sounded so easy, perhaps after all it wasn't like the story book kind she had always thrilled to read about. Was it only being glad that Tom was coming into the room that made Louise's eyes light up so? Was it only being glad that Charles was coming home that made Helen spend hours over the stove cooking things that she knew he particularly liked? Winona was always fair. If the answer "yes" to these questions were the things that went to make up love, well, she had felt them all for Roger, so perhaps she loved him. She tried to explain it all to him, but he was so delighted with her first rather faint "yes" that he paid no attention to her reasoning.

And so when they went into the tiny hall of the Little Crooked House and Roger stood holding her hand for a minute before she turned to go up stairs, she found that he had taken her tremulous "yes" for a final answer and that his spirits were consequently on tiptoe from happiness. He was just about to turn to go out of the front door, after having bade her goodnight and promising that he would call for her the next afternoon at the Garnett House and take her to tea at a new delightful place he had discovered, when they both paused to listen, for the sound of voices came from the

living room, where the heavy velvet curtains which hung across the doorway, had shut out any reflection of light. Winona held up her finger for silence and they stood motionless. It was Sonia's voice, raised to an even higher pitch than usual, which came to them first. And then Winona turned and looked at Roger in surprise, for the voice that answered Sonia's was Billy Lee's.

"Whatever are they doing up at this time of night?" Winona said with a slight frown. She felt more or less responsible for the Russian girl and she now felt decidedly cross at Billy for staying so late. He ought to have known better, even if Sonia didn't.

She walked across the hallway and drew aside the heavy curtain. Billy and Sonia were sitting on Helen's and Charles' antique divan, which stood before the fire. As she came into the room, they both turned and saw her. Roger was close behind and now Billy who had stood up as soon as he saw it was Winona, came forward and greeted them both.

"I didn't realize it was so late," Billy said, pulling out his watch and glancing at the time. "I must apologize to you, Sonia, for staying so late."

"Apologize?" Sonia said in her quick excited way, making a rather pretty gesture with

her hands. "And why should you apologize for making yourself so amusing that I forget the time?"

Billy flushed and turned to Winona, but she turned away and walked over to the other side of the room without giving him any sign that he was forgiven. But Roger, who was so happy that he couldn't bear to see anyone else feeling badly even for a minute, followed Winona and said something to her in a low voice.

She shook her head in answer but as he turned and went back to where Sonia still sat on the divan and Billy stood self-consciously before her, she raised her hand as though to call him back and then repenting her action, turned and looked out the window as she had done the night when she had thought that Florence was going to announce her engagement to Billy Lee, that never to be forgotten evening when Winona had tried to play the part of a flapper.

She could hear Roger's voice, rising and falling, as he told the others of Winona's and his engagement. Suddenly, Winona wanted to run over to them and tell them it wasn't absolutely true. She had told Roger she thought she loved him, but oh, did she love him enough to leave the Little Crooked House and

Tom and Louise and the others? She didn't know! She truthfully didn't know!

Sonia went over first to where Winnie stood by the window. She held out her hand and murmured a few low words about happiness. But there was none of the enthusiasm that Winnie had expected the Russian girl to show. Her good wishes were merely conventional. Billy however, came over and took both her hands and held them very tightly.

"I wish you all happiness," he said and there was a husky note in his voice as he said it. "My wishes are not idle ones," he continued. "You must know that they are sincere. I am so fond of you both, I know that you can make each other happy."

Winona found herself fighting the most awful impulse to put her head down on the table and cry and let Billy comfort her with brotherly pats on her back. She wanted to tell him all about it and ask his advice, and then she realized that she couldn't do that. She looked at him instead and smiled and thanked him, and in another minute he was gone. Roger too, went with him, and left Sonia and Winnie alone.

"Tell me, do you love this English baronet?" Sonia asked in her brusque way.

There was a note in Sonia's voice that made Winnie answer her shortly.

"Yes" she said, and added, "Why do you ask?"

Sonia turned away with a slight lifting of her shoulders, and made no answer. She walked to the doorway and turned, waiting for Winona who had stayed behind to put out the light. They went up stairs together.

As she went into Louise's room as quietly as she could, she couldn't help recalling the night when Louise had left Tom down at the boat-dock and had run all the way home with the news of her engagement to Tom. How happy she had been, Winona tried to analyse her feelings now in regard to her engagement to Roger, but somehow the memory of Billy's face and voice had a way of mixing itself up with Roger's and suddenly she sat straight up in her narrow bed in the darkness, for the thought which had come to her and had startled her into her upright position was that she was in love with Billy! Head over heels, horribly in love, exactly as Louise and Helen were! And what had made her realize it was that she had unconsciously been putting Billy in Roger's place all evening, and it was only until she had laid down in the friendly darkness and gone over her thoughts and feelings

truthfully, that she had realized this to be so! And with the first happiness of knowing that at last she knew the truth and had found her dream, there came the dreadful thought of how much it was going to hurt Roger and how she would break her engagement with him. Turn whichever way she might, she seemed unable to find a way out. She was sure of two things, first that she loved Billy, second that she could never marry Roger. Things having assumed their right proportions she knew now that she must have always loved Billy. It was Billy who had been her dream all the time. She realized this now. Oh, why couldn't it have been Billy who had proposed to her that evening? Or did things have to work out the way they had so that she could realize she loved him and not Roger? And then because life suddenly seemed so hard, she began to cry softly to herself, burying her head into her pillow to smother the sobs. But Louise heard her. She came running over to Winnie's bed and soon had her arms around her friend and was begging her to tell her all. Between her sobs which she tried hard to control, Winnie poured out the story of that evening. Louise listened patiently, without asking any questions, until the end, then she said, still holding Winona

very tightly and rocking her back and forth as though she were a baby:

"Winnie dear, there is nothing to do but tell Roger tomorrow when he calls for you at the Garnett House. I've thought I've known for a long time that you and Billy were in love with each other but I think Billy always thought you were half in love with Roger. I think that was why he didn't seem upset tonight when Roger announced your engagement. I guess he'd been thinking about it a lot and was rather prepared for it and I think that was why he didn't tell you he loved you himself. But why did Roger announce your engagement tonight? I think it was rather silly of him, unless he was afraid you might change your mind overnight if he didn't"

"What shall I do?" Winona asked piteously. "I'll have to tell Roger I don't love him, that is going to be terribly hard, but I can't tell Billy I love him, no matter what happens."

"We'll find some way," Louise said consolingly, and then held up her finger for silence. Very distinctly they heard outside the door, a board creaking. Louise ran over and threw the door wide open. Sonia, in a dressing gown and slippers stood outside. It was easy to see that she had been listening, but

just how much she had heard neither of the girls could tell.

"Sonia, what are you doing?" Louise asked in a scornful voice.

Sonia's dark eyes flashed fire, she was always jealous of Louise because of Winona's evident fondness for her, and now she turned on her, all her acquired poise leaving her.

"I have been listening," she said hotly, "Listening with my ear to the door, if you would know. I have heard only that which I have known for a long time. Winona loves Billy Lee. She does not love the Englishman."

She turned and went across to her own room, slamming the door behind her. Louise went back to Winona.

Roger didn't call for Winona the next day at the Garnett House. Instead a note came from him saying that he couldn't see her that afternoon but would go up later to the little Crooked House and meet her there. She was relieved, for that meant the evil moment of breaking her engagement could be postponed. Louise and she went home together on the top of a bus, which took them much longer but gave them more time to plan what had to be done.

But plans of mice and men often come to

naught, and the girls found this to be the case with their carefully laid ones.

Roger came that evening and the other occupants of the living room, after staying a little while, tactfully left Winnie and him alone. They were sitting side by side on the divan when Roger leaned across and took one of Winnie's hands. It happened to be her left one and she thought the moment had come when he was going to give her a ring; she knew that she must stop him before he did this. But his first words made her sit up and listen, hardly able to believe her ears.

"Winnie," he said gently, "I have been thinking things over since last night, and I have come to the conclusion that I was rather hasty. I am afraid I took advantage of you and practically bullied you into saying you loved me. And I can't remember you saying in actual words that you would marry me," he added half whimsically. "I took a great deal for granted. Lots more than I had any business to. I'm sorry, so I've come to tell you tonight that our engagement is off, until perhaps you want to tell me yourself that you are ready to marry me."

At first the relief was so great that Winnie couldn't find anything to say. Roger himself

was making things so easy for her. Then impulsively she held out her hand.

"Roger," she said gently, "I'm afraid you are right. I think we were both rather carried away last night. It is very generous of you to release me, and I shall never forget your kindness."

"Then there isn't any hope?" Roger said in an odd voice. "Oh, I had rather hoped that she had been mistaken," he added under his breath as if he was thinking aloud.

"Who had been mistaken?" Winnie asked sharply. Suddenly it came to her, perhaps Louise out of the goodness of her heart had gone to Roger and told him everything. But Louise never betrayed confidences and Winnie had begged her not to tell anyone of her last night's crying spell.

Roger flushed, as though he was ashamed of being caught up that way.

"I was only thinking aloud," he said rather shamefacedly, and then trying to change the subject, he said:

"We won't let this hurt our friendship, will we Winnie?" and put out a friendly hand.

Winona took it gratefully and shook her head. She could not have spoken then for she wanted to cry. Roger was being so kind and considerate. But looking back on her friend-

ship with Roger, she could never recall a time when he had been anything but kind and considerate. Kind and considerate and very, very lovable.

And then Roger took her hand and looking deep into her eyes asked her again:

"You are sure, Winnie, that you never, never could marry me?"

And Winona looking back at him and knowing that the kindest thing to do was to make one final decision, a decision which would hold no false hope for him, answered gently but firmly:

"I'm sure, Roger, dear."

Billy Lee was the only one who went down to see Roger off this time, for Roger chose a time when he was sure the girls would be busy. No one knew what passed between the two boys, but for a week or so after Roger left, Billy was very silent and inclined to keep to himself. It was fully a month later when Billy, coming upon Winona suddenly, sitting on the floor before the fire in the living room, all alone, went over and dropped down on the rug next to her. She looked shyly across at him, as he sat silently, after their first greeting, and studied his profile against the dancing flames. He turned suddenly, and perhaps it was what he saw in Winona's eyes which made

him lift her hand, which was lying idly on the rug between them, and press it to his lips. For he had turned so suddenly that she had not had time to let the curtain drop behind her eyes which covered the love she had for him in her heart. In that minute he had been able to see deep down into the deepest part of her heart.

"Darling," he said huskily, "I've loved you forever, it seems."

Winnie didn't think that any answer was needed or that their conversation had to be carried on any farther. She simply dropped her head down on his shoulder, where she let it lie comfortably and knowing that it had found its right home at last.

A year later Camp Karonya had two more weddings. Winona and Billy and Louise and Tom.

People came from all over, and the little church wasn't large enough to hold everyone, so receptions were held at both houses the brides and grooms being passed around like Best Sellers, as Louise laughingly said.

Florence was Winona's bridesmaid, and Andrew of the dimples was one of the ushers along with three other friends of Billy's. Mrs. Lee of course came North for the wedding, and Nataly came too, bringing her millionaire husband.

Helen and Charles with their young daughter, Helen Grace, Jr., were made quite as much fuss over as the brides and grooms themselves for they had presented the Camp Fire Circle with its first junior member of the Camp Fire.

Marie Hunter and Edith Hillis and Adelaide Hughes had decided to take over the Little Crooked House. Winona and Billy were to travel for a little while, and then later were to live part of the time in the South. Tom and Louise were taking an apartment farther down town, Tom having been made Night City Editor of his paper. Helen and Charles were planning to buy a small house in some suburb of New York where Helen Grace, Jr., would be able to grow up properly, they declared.

As they went up together to change to their traveling dresses Louise whispered to Winnie that she had something special to tell her.

In the privacy of Winnie's room where they were both dressing, Louise told Winona that it was Sonia who had been responsible for the whole thing.

" She heard you crying that night and came out of her room and deliberately listened at the door and heard you telling me all. She called

Roger up the next morning at his hotel and went down and saw him, after making an appointment with him. He promised to release you, which he did. Then the day Billy went down to see him off, he told Billy about it and what Sonia had said. So you see I have been wrong about Sonia all along, and I feel I'll never be able to make it up to her."

As she finished speaking their came a loud knock on the door and at Winnie's bid to come in, Sonia opened the door and then coming in closed it softly behind her.

"I wanted to see you for the last time," she said going over to Winnie and looking at her intently. "Are you happy little friend?" she asked almost wistfully.

"So happy! Thanks to you, Sonia dear," Winona cried, throwing her arms impulsively round the Russian girl's neck.

Sonia frowned.

"Thanks to me?" she asked almost crossly, and then added with a hasty glance at Louise. "Who has been telling tales?"

"I have," Louise said stoutly, coming over and taking Sonia's hand. "I told Winona what Billy Lee told me only yesterday. How you simply took things into your own hands and straightened them out for Winnie."

"It is nothing," Sonia said, turning away.

"It was only what I should have done. Winona has been the one good friend I have ever had. She had remained my friend through everything. You think I have no love nor gratitude in my heart?" she cried almost fiercely. "I would die for Winona if it would save her pain in any way."

Winona couldn't help looking and feeling embarrassed at this vehement outburst, but she said gently to the Russian girl, patting the hand which she still held tightly.

"I shall always consider you one of my best friends, Sonia. Only a true friend could have done what you did for me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for you have made me the happiest girl in the world."

"Not quite the happiest," Louise said laughingly. "Remember you still have Helen and me to contend with. We both consider that we have a perfect right to that title ourselves."

"The happiest!" Winnie said firmly. "The very happiest, whatever you and Helen may say, for you see neither one of you have Billy have you?"

"No, we haven't Billy," Louise admitted but added, "We have better at home!"

The door flew open just then and Florence came in.

"Hurry up," she cried, and then seeing

that there was lots of time as neither of the girls were nearly ready yet, she sat down on the foot of the bed and looked at them both critically.

Suddenly she said:

"I have something to tell you. Andrew just proposed to me now, downstairs. I'm the happiest girl in the world!"

She didn't know why Louise and Winnie and Sonia all looked at one another and burst out laughing. She was inclined to be hurt and angry at first, then Winona ran over and threw her arms about her.

"I'm so glad, dear," she cried and Louise and Sonia came over too and Florence forgot to be angry as she told them all about it.

"We'll be married when I'm twenty-one," she finished up.

Another knock came at the door just then, and Mrs. Whitney came in next. Fat little Matilda peeked round her mother's skirt and slipped in too.

"You are all like the six sillies," Mrs. Whitney said laughingly. "We've sent everyone up to tell you to come down and they forget to come down themselves."

"We'll hurry!" Louise cried dashing around and slipping into her pretty traveling suit which Sonia helped her to fasten.

Finally they were dressed and as they came down the stairs someone cried:

"You forgot to throw your bride's bouquets."

"So we did," Winnie cried, and Florence flew back to the room to get them.

Louise was the first to throw hers and a pretty girl, who was John Van Horne's fiancée, and who had come to the weddings with John and his father and her aunt, caught it.

Winona looked down on the sea of laughing women's and girl's faces below her. She then closed her eyes and threw her bouquet as far as she could. When she opened her eyes again, she found that Miss Latimer had caught the flowers and was now holding them and blushing as prettily as a girl, as the others gathered around her.

There had only been one slight thing in the day that had kept it from being perfectly happy. No word of any kind had come from Roger. Winnie had hoped that he would have sent some word of some kind. And then, just as they were going out to the waiting automobiles, they saw a taxi turn the corner, coming at a dreadful pace.

Quite before it stopped completely the door opened and Roger jumped out. He ran forward and begged them to wait a minute then

WINONA THREW HER BOUQUET AS FAR AS SHE COULD

dashed back and helped his mother and one of his sisters out of the taxi. Then a third foot was seen on the step and out came a girl. She was very pretty, fresh and dainty colored as English girls always are. Roger introduced them all around and the pretty girl was his second cousin, it seemed.

"I was so afraid we wouldn't get here in time," Roger said, in a low voice to Winnie, as he held her hand for the last time in farewell "I wanted you to know how much I wish your happiness, though I honestly don't see how you can help being the happiest girl in the world with old Billy, he is such a brick."

"I don't see how I can help being, either," she laughingly answered, and added: "But you'll have to ask Louise and Helen about that. They dispute the title with me, each declaring they alone are the happiest."

"I wouldn't worry about that," Roger said, smiling at her bright eyes and happy face.

His little cousin called him just then and he turned to answer her. And as she watched him, Winona knew that she had nothing to worry about as far as he was concerned, any more.

Billy came down the steps of the house just then and helped her into the car, then went in

and climbed into the driver's seat. Tom and Louise were in their car behind. Winona took one last look at her family and friends gathered together on the porch and the front lawn to watch them depart.

She waved to them for the last time, then when they reached the corner and the house and people were out of sight, she turned an April face up to Billy.

"Billy," she said, looking up lovingly into his face, "*Was* there ever such a happy girl in the world?"

"I don't know about girls," Billy said, looking down at her affectionately, "But I do know there never was a happier man."

"And we'll have them all down South for Christmas, as we have always planned," Winona said a little while later, and she gave the grubby little bunch of wild-flowers, which had been contributed by her library children as a parting offering, a tender little pat of perfect contentment.

"And how about your dreams?" Billy said teasingly. "Do you think you've found your new one?"

"It is such a big one, I am afraid I'll not always know just what to do with it," Winona said, half laughingly, half seriously.

At a cross-roads, Billy slowed down and waited for the car containing Tom and Louise to come up to them.

"We part here," Billy said, pointing to one road which led North and the other South.

"Good-bye, good-bye," the girls called to each other, and then the boys turned their machines and each car went its own road, and each car contained a boy and a girl who were sure they were the happiest people in the world.

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